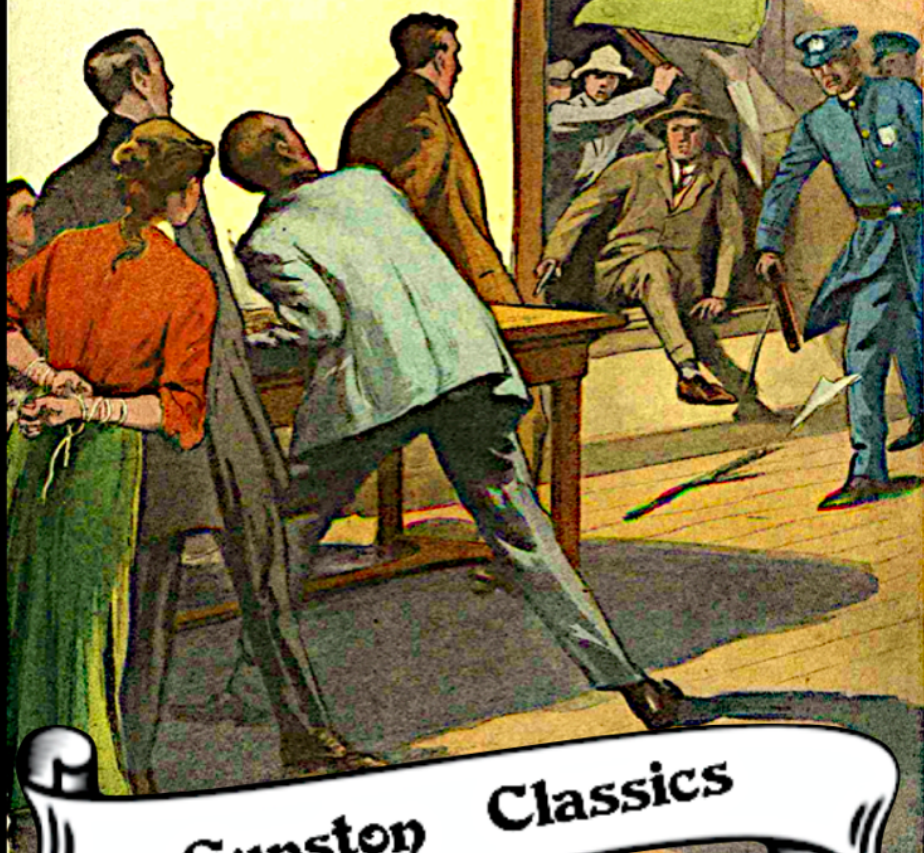


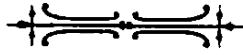
Nick Carter Stories

THE CALL OF DEATH

— or —
Nick Carter's Clever Assistant



Gunston Classics



No. 121
Nick Carter -
THE CALL OF DEATH
1915



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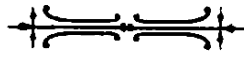
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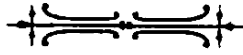


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Detective - Nick Carter



THE CALL OF DEATH

Or, NICK CARTER'S CLEVER ASSISTANT.

CHAPTER I.

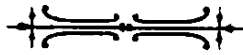
A CURIOUS LETTER.

There's no question in my mind, inspector, as to who did the job," said Nick Carter.

"You feel sure of it, then?"

"As sure as water runs downhill. I refer, of course, to the mechanical part of the work. I looked it over on the morning following the burglary, every part of the looted vault, and I am as sure of the cracksman's identity as if I had seen him getting in his work. Only one yegg in the business has the mechanical genius to crack a vault as that was cracked."

"James Nordeck?"



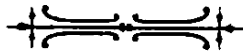
“Surely. I have seen Nordeck’s work before, and I know it when I see it. It is invariably stamped with his mechanical ingenuity. Jim Nordeck is in a class of his own at that business.”

“Here is his mug, front and profile, chief, also his record. Have a look at them.”

The last came from Chick Carter, the celebrated detective’s senior assistant, and the remarks of both were addressed to Inspector Mallory, then head of the detective force identified with the New York police department.

They were discussing the recent burglary of a savings bank up in Westchester County, a crime committed about a week before, in which the remarkably skillful drilling of the vault for the use of explosives, as well as other details of the felonious work, plainly showed it to have been that of professional cracksmen.

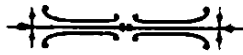
As may be inferred from the remarks he had just made, it revealed something more to Nick Carter—the identity of one of the criminals, at least, with certain characteristics of whose skillful work along such infamous lines the detective was already familiar.



Though discovered before having completed their work, the burglars had succeeded in getting away with nearly two hundred thousand dollars in cash, bonds, and negotiable securities; but not until one of their number had been seriously wounded with the revolver of a citizen who had heard and pursued them, as was evidenced by a trail of blood, to the motor car in which they escaped with their plunder.

None of it had since been recovered. Negotiations with the crooks had been undertaken by the bank officials through the newspapers, with a view to recovering part of the stolen funds, and a liberal reward had also been offered for information leading to the discovery and arrest of the thieves. All of these endeavors, however, had proved entirely futile.

The trail of the crooks had, in fact, been hopelessly lost. Nor was there any clew to their identity, aside from the opinion expressed by Nick Carter on the day following the crime, when he had been called upon to inspect the work of the burglars, despite the fact that he had declined to take the case in conjunction with the police and detectives already employed on it.



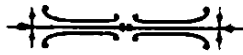
Nick's views had been mentioned to Inspector Mallory, and this had occasioned his visit that morning, and the discussion then in progress in the business office of the detective's Madison Avenue residence, then occupied only by the three persons mentioned.

Inspector Mallory took the card tendered by Chick Carter with the remarks above noted. It had been taken by Chick from a large cabinet of drawers containing the Bertillon signaletic cards of thousands of other crooks, and it contained two photographs and the criminal record of the man then under discussion.

The face that met the inspector's gaze was not a prepossessing one. It was that of a man of fifty—a hard and sinister face, with a low brow and narrow eyes, a hooked nose, like the beak of a bird of prey, a square jaw, and thin lips, drawn downward at the corners—a more evil and cruel face than one often viewed.

“He looks like a bad egg, indeed, Chick,” said Inspector Mallory, grimly inspecting the two photographs.

“His looks flatter him,” Chick replied. “He's the worst in the business.”



“His record corroborates you,” said the inspector, while he read the criminal career noted on the card. “He appears to have been extraordinarily lucky, however, in eluding arrest and doing time.”

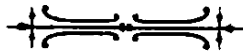
“Lucky is right,” Nick put in. “He has been peculiarly fortunate in that respect, Mallory, but very unlucky in others.”

“How so, Nick?”

“I happen to know something about the inside history of the rascal,” Nick explained. “I got it from one of his old pals, Darby Moore, who died in Matteawan less than a year ago.”

“I knew him,” Inspector Mallory said.

“Aside from his legitimate trade as a machinist, at which Nordeck is an expert, he has absolutely no head on his shoulders,” Nick proceeded. “He could not frame up and pull off a job of any size, to say nothing of this savings-bank break, if his life depended upon it. He can work to advantage only when guided by a capable leader. Take it from me, Mallory, this Westchester job was directed by such a man, not by Jim Nordeck. There was a much bigger man than he behind the gun.”



“Do you know him, Nick?” questioned Mallory, with sharper scrutiny.

“I do not.”

“Or suspect his identity?”

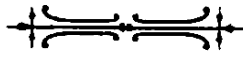
“No.”

“What do you mean by Nordeck’s having been peculiarly unfortunate?”

“In that he has been repeatedly cheated by his confederates out of most of his share of the plunder,” Nick explained. “He has been an easy mark in that respect ever since his wife died, something like a dozen years ago. She was a shrewd Englishwoman, but thoroughly unscrupulous, who looked after his interests and handled his money. Since her death, however, though he is known to have had a hand in numerous profitable jobs, Nordeck has been hard up most of the time.”

“Through having been victimized by his confederates?”

“Exactly. He now fights shy of trusting them, even.”



“You got all this from Darby Moore?”

“Yes. I had an interview with him on the day he died. I know he told me the truth.”

“This card states that Nordeck has a daughter, who is also a crook.”

“That is correct.”

“Do you know her, or anything about her?”

“I have seen her,” Nick replied. “I saw her less than a month ago, in fact, which is another reason why I feel sure that Nordeck had a hand in this burglary.”

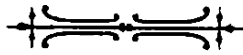
“She sticks to him, eh?”

“That’s what! They never have been separated. I knew the moment I saw her that Jim Nordeck was in these parts, and that something was likely to come off.”

“Why didn’t you track the girl to cover?”

“It was impossible, Mallory, under the circumstances.”

“Why so?”



“She was in an elevated train going north, and I was in another going south,” smiled Nick. “Both trains had stopped at a station, and I saw her through one of the windows. I could not wish myself from one train to another.”

“True,” Inspector Mallory admitted, laughing. “Have you seen the girl since then?”

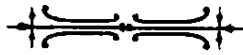
“No.”

“How old is she?”

“Not much over twenty,” said Nick. “Her name is Nancy Nordeck, though I guess she uses an alias most of the time.”

“Yes, no doubt,” Mallory dryly allowed.

“She looked very seedy, as well as I could judge through the car window,” Nick added. “This savings-bank break may replenish her purse, however, and put Jim Nordeck in funds. If his pals don’t bunco him, he ought to be well heeled for some little time—unless some of your men succeed in rounding up this gang. I infer that there is no immediate prospect of it.”



“No, I am sorry to say,” Inspector Mallory admitted.

“I see that the bank directors have offered a reward of ten thousand dollars for the recovery of the plunder.”

“Yes. They can well afford to pay that for it.”

“And then some,” put in Chick pointedly. “I doubt that any of the gang who did that job will squeal, however, for it smacks of crooks who keep their traps closed under any and all circumstances. If they——”

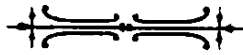
“Stop a moment!” Nick interposed. “What is wanted, Joseph?”

The office door had been opened by Nick’s manservant, who then paused respectfully on the threshold.

“Detective Vallon is here, sir,” he replied. “He wants to see Inspector Mallory.”

“Vallon here!” exclaimed Mallory surprisedly. “Let him come in, Nick. I’ll see what he wants.”

“Show him in, Joseph,” Nick directed.



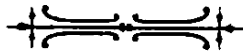
He entered a moment later, a plain-clothes man, from police headquarters, with whom both Nick and Chick shook hands cordially, while he was briefly stating his mission.

“I’ve got a special delivery for you, inspector,” said he. “It is marked private and rush, and I reckoned it might be very important. The lieutenant said I’d be likely to find you here, so here I am—and here’s the letter.”

Inspector Mallory took it and glanced at the superscription. It was addressed with a lead pencil, in a somewhat coarse, irregular hand, which, with the misspelling of several words, plainly evinced the writer’s lack of education. Prominent in the lower corners of the envelope were the two words—rush and private.

“Humph!” Mallory grunted, with a puzzled expression. “Mailed this morning in Harlem. I don’t know the hand. Never saw one quite so scrawly. It may be important, nevertheless, Vallon, as you say.”

Chief Mallory broke the seal while speaking, then drew out the inclosed sheet of paper.



A folded bank note slipped from it and fell to the floor.

“By Jove, chief, that’s a good beginning!” said Chick, laughing.

“I believe your story,” Mallory replied, bending to pick up the bank note. “Hello! Fifty bucks, too, and a brand-new bill. I could stand a gift of this kind every day in the year.”

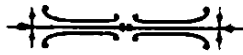
It was, indeed, a crisp, brand-new bank note for fifty dollars.

Nick Carter eyed the inspector more narrowly when he opened and read the letter, noting his gradual change of expression.

“By thunder, here’s a curious case!” Mallory exclaimed, looking up. “It cannot be a hoax, not with fifty simoleons backing up the story. Have a look, Nick. Read it aloud.”

Nick took the letter and read it aloud, as directed, a penciled, illiterate scrawl, as follows:

“Mr. Inspector Mallory: There be a ded man up in number aity to P—— Street, Harlem. I want him planted rite, but I ain’t got no time to tend to it. I



know you are ded square when it comes to a show-down, so I send you the coin to foot the bills with, and I ax you to tend to him. Git him a good box with black cloth on the outside of it and silver grips. I would ax you to git a silver plait, to, only I can't tell you his monaker. I thank you beforehand, knowing you will tend to him. Please have a praer sed for him."

Nick Carter read this rude scrawl indifferently at first, then glanced at it again more carefully.

Mallory, watching him, detected a sharper gleam deep down in his more serious eyes. He straightened up and inquired abruptly:

"What do you think of it?"

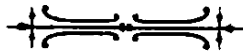
"It's on the level," said Nick. "The woman means what she says."

"Woman?" questioned Mallory quickly. "How do you know a woman wrote it? It isn't signed."

"True."

"And the writing looks like a man's?"

"True again."



“Why do you think, then, that a woman wrote it?”

“Sentiment,” said Nick tersely. “It appears between the lines, illiterate though they are. We very seldom find it in men of the class in which the writer of this evidently falls.”

“A fallen class, evidently,” remarked Detective Vallon.

“Possibly,” Nick allowed. “She has a high opinion of you, Mallory, all the same. Very properly too.”

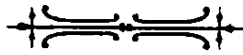
“Thanks!” blurted the chief a bit gruffly.

“You had better go up there and look into the case. Fifty dollars will more than foot the bills. It’s quite remarkable, by the way, where the writer raised that amount, and—let me see the bank note, Mallory.”

“It looks all right,” said the inspector, complying.

“True,” said Nick. “It is not a counterfeit, but evidently is fresh from—— Yes, by Jove, you had better go up there,” he abruptly digressed. “If you think well of it, Mallory, I’ll go with you.”

“I shall be more than pleased,” declared Mallory, with a look of surprise.



“I’ll have my chauffeur bring around the touring car,” added Nick, touching an electric button on his desk. “There will be room for you, Chick, and for Vallon, also, if he cares to go.”

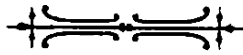
“I’m hooked,” Vallon quickly nodded. “Count me in.”

As the four detectives were descending the steps of Nick’s residence five minutes later, however, at which his touring car then was standing, a rapidly driven limousine approached and swerved to the curbing near by.

Nick paused instinctively, then approached to meet a handsome, fashionably clad young woman, who had hurriedly alighted and drawn nearer.

“You were going away, Mr. Carter, and I am just in time,” she said quietly yet in some excitement. “You must postpone it. I must see you alone immediately—no, no, don’t refuse! I’ll not take no for an answer. I really must see you. It’s a case of life or death.”

“What is the trouble, Miss Farley?” Nick gravely inquired, noting her paleness.



“I cannot tell you here—not here!” she whispered. “Do please give me your time. Money is no object, Mr. Carter, and——”

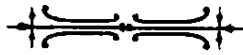
“Hush!”

Nick turned to the men in the touring car.

“I must cut out the visit to Harlem, inspector,” he said significantly. “Chick will go with you, however, and—— Well, you understand.”

“Certainly, Nick, certainly!” Inspector Mallory assured him. “There is nothing involved in it. Chick will inform you later of all the facts. No apology is necessary.”

“Let her go, Danny,” Chick directed, when Nick turned to rejoin the waiting woman. “No. 82 P —— Street, Harlem. Eat it up lively!”



CHAPTER II

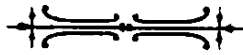
THE MISSING RECTOR

Nick Carter had more than one reason for complying with the request of the young lady who had arrived at his residence just as he was departing.

Nick was influenced not only by her manifest anxiety and agitation, but also by the fact that her wealthy father, Archibald Farley, who had died about a year before, leaving her something like five millions, had been a personal friend, and had frequently entertained him in his magnificent Westchester mansion.

Nick knew, moreover, that Harriet Farley was a remarkably sensible, level-headed girl, and that she would not thus have appealed to him without very serious occasion. He conducted her into his library, therefore, instead of to his business office, that he might suffer no interruption.

“Take an armchair, Miss Farley,” said he, placing one for her. “Compose yourself, too, for I see that you are quite nervous. What is the trouble?”



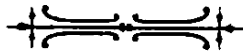
“I ought not to have come in here, Mr. Carter, for I want you to go with me,” she replied. “It may be just as well, however, if I first tell you the cause of my anxiety.”

“I think so,” said Nick, taking a chair near her.

She was a very beautiful girl, in the twenties, of light complexion, and with wonderfully blue, expressive eyes. Her features were of a refined and classic cast, evincing culture and strength of character. Her head was finely poised and crowned with an abundance of wavy auburn hair. She was above medium height, with a supple, graceful figure, the attractive lines of which were accentuated by her close-fitting, fashionable garments.

“You must not think my fear is foolish. Mr. Carter, nor my interest in this matter presumptuous,” she said earnestly, replying to the detective’s remark. “I have serious reasons for both, and I shall insist upon your investigating the matter immediately, if I can prevail upon you to do so.”

“Your father and I were very good friends, Miss Farley,” Nick replied. “I would be very glad to be of service to you.”



“I felt sure of it, Mr. Carter, thank you.”

“What is the matter to which you refer?”

“It relates to the disappearance of quite a noted young clergyman, the Reverend Austin Maybrick, rector of St. Lawrence Church, which I attend. I know that he has met with evil of some kind.”

“I know Mr. Maybrick very well by reputation,” said Nick. “He is fast becoming noted for his eloquence, his advanced ideas, and his charitable work among the lowest classes. He has a very wealthy parish, I believe?”

“Yes, very; it includes some of the richest residents of Westchester County.”

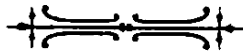
“You say that Mr. Maybrick is mysteriously missing?”

“Yes.”

“Since when?”

“Since nine o’clock last evening.”

“But that is not long,” said Nick significantly.
“Surely, Miss Farley——”



“I know what you would say, Mr. Carter, but it would have no weight with me,” she hurriedly interposed. “I am absolutely sure that he is the victim of knavery of some kind.”

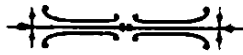
“But why are you so sure of it? Have you any definite reasons?”

“Yes, many.”

“Tell me,” said Nick, “what are your reasons, and the circumstances in connection with his disappearance.”

Miss Farley drew up in her chair. A wave of red appeared in her cheeks and dispelled her paleness. She met Nick’s grave scrutiny with outward composure, however, and replied with characteristic frankness:

“I must begin, Mr. Carter, with telling you of my relations with Mr. Maybrick. He has been very kind to me since my father died a year ago, leaving me very wealthy, but deplorably alone in the world. Mr. Maybrick called often during my father’s illness, and his visits have been even more frequent since his death. They have given rise to rumors, Mr. Carter, that Mr. Maybrick and I are in love, and likely to be married.”



“Is there any truth in them?” Nick inquired.

“Yes.”

“Are you engaged to Mr. Maybrick?”

“I am, Mr. Carter, though the engagement has not been announced,” said Harriet. “I have been in mourning for a year, you know, discarding it only a week ago.”

“I understand,” said Nick.

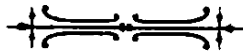
“I have been very careful during my period of mourning that nothing should be said about my engagement, and I know that Mr. Maybrick has not disclosed it by so much as a hint. He is absolutely reliable.”

“No doubt.”

“The truth is suspected, nevertheless, and bitterly resented.”

“Resented by whom?”

“By a woman with whom Mr. Maybrick was on terms of friendly intimacy before falling in love with me,” said Miss Farley, coloring again. “He assures me that their friendship was entirely



proper, which I fully believe, but the woman evidently intends to take advantage of it, and make trouble for him. She has threatened him with a lawsuit, to say nothing of other vengeful proceedings, unless he ends his relations with me and consents to marry her.”

“Who informed you of her feelings and intentions?” Nick inquired.

“Mr. Maybrick.”

“How does he regard her threats?”

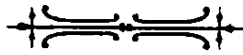
“He has ignored them, Mr. Carter, and very properly, too,” said Miss Farley. “He knows that she has been stealthily watching him, nevertheless, spying by night near the rectory, though with what design he cannot conjecture.”

“How long has this been going on?”

“For more than a week, evidently, culminating in what occurred last night.”

“What was that?”

“Would to Heaven I could tell you,” Miss Farley fervently exclaimed. “Don’t ask me, Mr. Carter.



That is what I want you to find out—and what has become of him.”

“You mean—— Stop a moment!” Nick abruptly digressed. “Who is this jealous woman, who evidently feels that she has been wronged by Mr. Maybrick?”

“Her name is Kate Crandall.”

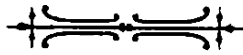
“A resident in your town?”

“Yes.”

“What do you know about her? Is she young and attractive, of good character and habits, or——”

Miss Farley checked him with a gesture.

“I know nothing about her morals,” she replied. “She is quite a handsome woman, about thirty years old. She is not a person of means. She is in business as a public stenographer, and has been frequently employed by the day in that capacity by Mr. Maybrick. She took his sermons in shorthand, and prepared a typewritten copy for him. She has been accustomed to doing that work at the rectory. I do not feel it necessary to look deeper into their relations, Mr. Carter, for I have



absolute faith in Mr. Maybrick's honor and integrity. After what now has occurred, moreover _____”

“Let's drop everything else and come to that,” Nick interposed. “What can you tell me about it? You say that Mr. Maybrick was at home last evening?”

“Yes. He left the rectory about half past eight, as near as Mrs. Soule, his housekeeper, can inform me. She is the only servant employed by Mr. Maybrick, who has no near relatives. He is a man still under thirty, Mr. Carter.”

“Did he leave home alone?”

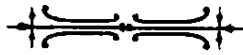
“Yes.”

“Without telling Mrs. Soule where he was going, or when he would return?”

“Neither,” said Miss Farley. “I will state all of the known circumstances, Mr. Carter, as briefly as possible.”

“Do so,” said Nick.

“On Tuesday evening, night before last, a woman called at the rectory to see Mr. Maybrick,” Miss



Farley began. "Mrs. Soule admitted her, but she could not identify her, for the woman was closely veiled. Judging from her figure and carriage, however, she thinks it may have been Kate Crandall, but is not sure of it."

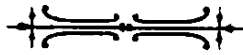
"Continue," said Nick. "I follow you."

"Mr. Maybrick received the woman in his library, closing the door, and she remained with him for nearly an hour," Miss Farley proceeded. "There would have been nothing strange in that, perhaps, but for what he did the following day, yesterday."

"What was that?"

"He drew five hundred dollars from the bank in the morning. Mrs. Soule saw the bank notes on his desk while he was at lunch. In the afternoon, Mr. Carter, he borrowed a leather suit case from a man friend living near by. He has one of his own, also, and he put both of them near the front door in the hall. Mrs. Soule saw them there, and asked him if he was going away. He replied that he was, but that he was not going far."

"Go on," said Nick.



“When at dinner, about half past six, however, he told Mrs. Soule that she need not leave a light for him, as he might be out unusually late. He said not a word concerning his mission or designs. He left the rectory about half past eight, as I have said, taking both suit cases.”

“Containing some of his garments, I suppose?”

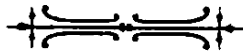
“On the contrary, Mr. Carter, both suit cases were—empty.”

“Empty!” echoed Nick, with more thoughtful gaze. “That indicates that he expected to bring back something in them?”

“Presumably.”

“How do you know they were empty?”

“Mrs. Soule had occasion to move one of them just before Mr. Maybrick departed,” Miss Farley explained. “She knew by its weight that it must be empty. She thought it strange that he had packed nothing in it, and she then lifted the other. That was empty, also, and Mr. Maybrick did not touch them again until he left the house.”



“H’m, I see!” Nick said quietly. “Anything more?”

“Not until this morning,” replied Miss Farley. “Mrs. Soule became anxious about nine o’clock, and she telephoned to me, asking me whether I knew why Mr. Maybrick was absent. I did not, of course, and, upon learning of the circumstances, I at once went to the rectory. I found Mr. Maybrick’s desk open, and I ventured to search for a letter, or something that might explain his absence.”

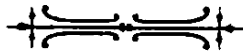
“Did you find anything?”

“Only something that greatly increased my anxiety.”

“What was that?”

“An empty revolver case in one of the drawers. I knew that he had such a weapon, Mr. Carter, for he has told me so, and I now feel sure that he took the revolver with him last evening. If I am right, it admits of only one interpretation, that he apprehended danger.”

“I agree with you,” said Nick. “Did you find the money mentioned, the five hundred dollars?”



“I did not,” Miss Farley said gravely. “It was not in his desk, nor in his bedroom. I think he took it with him, as well as the revolver, and I cannot but feel that he has met with foul play. He surely would have told Mrs. Soule if he had not intended to return before morning.”

“That does appear quite probable.”

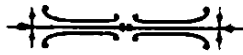
“Oh, I am sure of it, Mr. Carter. It is not at all like Mr. Maybrick to have been negligent in that way.”

“Have you taken any other steps in the matter?” Nick inquired.

“I telephoned to the bank to learn whether Mr. Maybrick had said why he needed so large a sum as five hundred dollars,” said Miss Farley. “The teller could not inform me. Mr. Maybrick presented his check and drew the money, but he had no conversation with the teller.”

“I see.”

“I also communicated with the gentleman from whom he borrowed the suit case. He said that Mr. Maybrick did not inform him why he wanted it, but promised to return it this morning. That



further convinces me, Mr. Carter, that he expected to return during the night.”

“I agree with you again,” said Nick. “Did he depart in a conveyance, or on foot?”

“On foot.”

“And you know nothing more of his movements?”

“Absolutely nothing.”

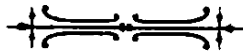
“How long ago were you at the rectory?”

“About an hour ago. I came directly here in my limousine.”

“I will call up Mrs. Soule and you may talk with her,” said Nick, turning to the telephone on his library table. “Find out whether Mr. Maybrick has returned since you left the rectory. If not, tell Mrs. Soule that you have conferred with me, and that I will call there in about an hour. Direct her to say and do nothing more until I arrive.”

“I understand,” Miss Farley said, complying eagerly.

“I will take one of my assistants along, also, and get you to take us out there,” Nick added.



“I will gladly do so, Mr. Carter.”

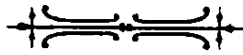
“Very good. You probably know Mr. Maybrick’s number. Talk with Mrs. Soule as I have directed.”

Miss Farley hastened to obey, quickly obtaining only negative information from the anxious housekeeper.

The Reverend Austin Maybrick had not returned.

Nick Carter rang for Joseph and sent for Patsy Garvan, his junior assistant.

Five minutes later, in company with Miss Farley and her chauffeur, they were speeding toward Westchester County and the home of the missing rector.



CHAPTER III

UNEXPECTED CLEWS

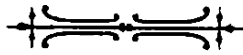
It was early afternoon when Nick Carter and Patsy arrived in the aristocratic suburb in which Harriet Farley dwelt, and nearly under the towering walls of St. Lawrence's Church. Nick directed the chauffeur to stop, however, nearly a hundred yards from the sacred edifice.

"You must drop us here, Miss Farley, and return home," said he. "I will take your telephone number and talk with you later."

"Why are you averse to my going with you to the rectory?" she inquired, with a look of surprise.

"Only because publicity is undesirable at present, if it can be prevented. And it may be of advantage to me if my investigations are not suspected," Nick explained. "If you were seen returning with two men after your visit this morning, curiosity might be aroused and inquiries and comments would follow."

"Very well, Mr. Carter, in that case," Miss Farley said. "But you must let me hear from you. I shall feel very anxious."



“I certainly will,” Nick assured her, while he alighted with Patsy.

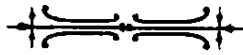
The limousine sped away, leaving the two detectives in a broad, beautifully shaded avenue flanked on both sides with handsome dwellings, each occupying spacious and finely kept grounds, evincing the opulence and refinement of the residents.

St. Lawrence’s Church occupied a corner in the near distance. It was a handsome edifice, somewhat back from the avenue, and flanked by a quiet side street, and Nick rightly inferred that the rectory, the home of the Reverend Austin Maybrick and his elderly housekeeper, was situated back of the church, and fronted on the side street.

“We’ll turn back to the corner, Patsy, and go through the side street,” he remarked, after briefly viewing the surroundings. “That will, unless I am much mistaken, bring us to the rectory.”

“I’m with you,” said Patsy tritely. “What do you make of the case, chief? Does it look bad to you?”

“Quite so,” Nick replied. “I did not increase Miss Farley’s anxiety by telling her so, but I think



Maybrick is in wrong, if not up against a more desperate game than he can pull out of unaided.”

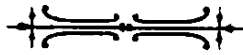
“It looks so, chief, for fair,” said Patsy, who had been informed of Miss Farley’s disclosures.

“I must find out, if possible, just what his relations with Kate Crandall have been,” said Nick. “Also, just what type of woman she is, and of what she is capable.”

“It’s dollars to doughnuts that she figures in his mysterious absence. Miss Farley evidently is too proud to say just what she thinks of the woman. It’s long odds that she’s a bit fly and fancy, at least.”

“Quite likely,” Nick allowed. “There are some experiences, you know, that women reveal only under desperation’s spur. Until driven to desperation, it is characteristic of their sex to be silent, and bitterly nurse their resentment. When self-restraint ends, however, and desperation takes the ribbons, they go completely over the traces and to any extreme.”

“That’s true, chief,” said Patsy. “Hell, it’s said, has no fury like a woman scorned. I reckon, chief, it



was Kate Crandall who called on Maybrick Tuesday evening?"

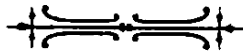
"That's an open question," said Nick. "It is important that we shall find a correct answer to it. The fact that the veiled woman, whoever she was, remained alone with Maybrick in the library for an hour, indicates that they were discussing a serious matter."

"Sure thing, chief."

"Evidently, too, their interview led to his withdrawing the five hundred dollars from the bank the following morning. He may for some reason have agreed to pay her that amount. The fact that he departed with two empty suit cases, however, shows that he was expecting to receive something from her, or from persons with whom he evidently had an appointment.

"His carrying a revolver, moreover, which is quite extraordinary for a clergyman, indicates that he anticipated trouble. He may have got in much deeper than he expected."

"In over his head, chief, I'm thinking," Patsy dryly vouchsafed.



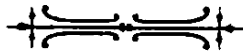
“That now appears to be about the size of it,” Nick agreed.

They had rounded a corner of the side street while speaking, and then were approaching the rectory. It stood on a plot of ground between the rear of the church and an attractive estate occupied by a handsome wooden dwelling. Both were somewhat back from the street, and an iron picket fence divided the two estates.

As he was approaching the end of this fence where it met the sidewalk, Nick recalled what Harriet Farley had said about Kate Crandall playing the spy near the rectory. He paused to view the adjoining grounds. They would have offered concealment for such a spy, and Nick’s impression proved profitable.

“This way, Patsy, for a moment,” he said quietly.

He saw that there was no path at that point leading to the rear of the house. The close-cut greensward showed faint footprints, nevertheless, and Nick walked into the grounds some twenty yards, carefully inspecting a narrow flower bed that ran parallel to and near the fence for a considerable distance. He found, not exactly what he was seeking, but of the same character.



He discovered several footprints in the dark soil of the flower bed, at a point nearly back of the rectory and some thirty feet from it. Contrary to Nick's expectations, however, the imprints evidently had been caused by the shoes of—men.

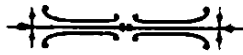
"By Jove, this opens a new field for conjecture," said he, calling Patsy's attention to them. "We have heard nothing about male spies in this locality. Only about the Crandall woman."

"Gee! that's right, chief, but these are men's tracks," said Patsy, eagerly inspecting them.

"Undoubtedly," said Nick. "There evidently were two of them. Note the two different sizes, also that the depth of the soles is greater than the heels, and that parts of each overlap themselves, all showing plainly enough that the two men were crouching here and evidently watching something, or some one, through the picket fence."

"Sure thing. There are no prints in any other part of the flower bed."

"There certainly were two men, Patsy, one of medium build, the other quite a large man, judging from the size of their shoes," Nick went on. "Through this shrubbery in the rectory yard



they could see only the rear and one side of the house, including the end of the veranda and the conservatory.”

“I get you, chief,” said Patsy. “Whomever they were watching must have been in that locality.”

“There is nothing specially distinctive in these imprints, however, aside from suggesting the size of the men,” Nick added. “We’ll keep them in mind, nevertheless, while looking farther.”

“Looking where, chief?”

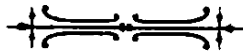
“In the rectory grounds,” said Nick. “If watching a person in the house, they would have selected a nearer point. It’s a safe wager, then, that they were watching some one—outside of the rectory.”

“Gee! that’s right, too,” said Patsy, quick to see the point. “Let’s have a look.”

“We’ll go out and enter through the gate. We may slip a cog if we try to scale these iron pickets.”

“I believe you. They’re as sharp as a trooper’s lance.”

Nick led the way to the street and to the gate entering the rectory grounds. The housekeeper



had not put in an appearance, and they proceeded around the veranda to that side of the dwelling visible from the adjoining estate. Carefully inspecting the ground in the meantime, Nick soon discovered evidence confirming his suspicions. He found as before, in fact, more evidence that he was expecting.

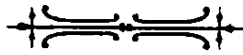
In some yielding earth between one side of the conservatory and the bend of the library window, a space of about eight feet, were numerous footprints obviously caused by the shoes of two women who had recently been there.

The impressions were very unlike each other. One was that of a slender shoe with a small, long heel that had sunk deep into the soft soil.

The other was larger and broader, with spreading soles and wide heels, generally known as common-sense heels.

Crouching to carefully inspect all of these impressions, Nick made other discoveries, from which he drew several important deductions.

“By Jove, this is still more curious,” he remarked, after a moment.



“What’s that, chief?” questioned Patsy, bending nearer.

“Two women have recently been here, instead of only one. The location of some of the tracks indicate that they came to spy through the library window and play the eavesdropper. It must have been in the evening, therefore, for they would have been seen in daylight.”

“Surely.”

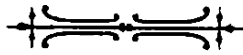
“Here are several bruised blades of grass broken off by them and trodden into the soil,” Nick added, picking up a couple of them. “They are too dry and wilted for it to have occurred as recently as last evening, yet they are fresh and green enough to show that it could not have been much longer ago. We can safely say night before last.”

“The evening when the veiled woman visited Maybrick.”

“Exactly.”

“Gee! you must be right, chief, though it’s fine figuring.”

“Here’s another curious point, Patsy.”



“Namely?”

“The two women, if their shoes have any significance, were of a decidedly opposite class,” said Nick. “One wore a narrow, high-heeled shoe, denoting a woman of fashion and means. The heels of the other were broad, both badly worn, and there was a patch on one of the soles. The patch has left its mark in some of these imprints, and the run-down condition of both heels appears in the indentations left by them.”

“I see,” said Patsy. “It’s as plain as twice two.”

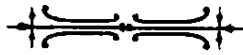
“This woman must be of an opposite class, then, from the other. She wears patched shoes, with the heels half gone, indicating that she cannot afford new ones.”

“That’s a sane-and-safe deduction, chief, surely.”

“Here is evidence warranting still another.”

“How so?”

“Note that all the imprints of the high-heeled shoes overlap and partly obliterate those of the cheaper ones,” Nick pointed out. “Plainly, then, the wearer of the former was here later than the



other. They were not here together, moreover, or their tracks would not be so intermingled.”

“I see the point, chief.”

“As near as I now can size it up, the poorer-clad woman, if her garments corresponded with her shoes, arrived here before the other, and she may have been the veiled woman who talked with Maybrick. The other may have seen her, or suspected that she was in the library with Maybrick, and she may have come here to watch them and overhear what passed between them.”

“And the two men beyond the picket fence may have been watching both.”

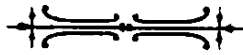
“I think so.”

“Gee whiz!” Patsy said perplexedly. “All this increases the mix-up, chief, for fair.”

“Decidedly,” Nick agreed.

“Why were two men and two women here? Can one of them have been the Crandall woman?”

“I’m going to find out a little later,” said Nick, a bit grimly. “We first will have a talk with Mrs. Soule, however, and see what we can discover in



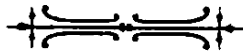
the house. Miss Farley, though a bright and brainy girl, may have overlooked something.”

Nick led the way to the rectory door and rang the bell. He was admitted by Mrs. Soule, to whom he introduced Patsy and himself, and whom he found to be an elderly, gracious woman of sixty, burdened with anxiety concerning the missing rector and eager to do all in her power to aid the detectives.

But she could add nothing to what she already had told Harriet Farley, as imparted to Nick, nor give the latter the slightest clew to the mystery. She could describe the rector’s veiled visitor only as a woman of about Kate Crandall’s height and figure, and had not observed whether she was well or rather poorly clad. She stated that the woman had merely asked whether Mr. Maybrick was at home and would see a lady for a short time, and that the rector had received her in his library.

“Are you sure that she spoke of herself as a lady?” Nick inquired. “She did not say woman, did she?”

“No, sir,” Mrs. Soule insisted. “I am positive that lady is the word she used.”



It was significant only in that Nick aimed to definitely learn, if possible, which of the two women suspected of having been spying outside had had an interview with Maybrick, if either of the two.

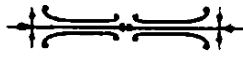
A search in the rector's desk, moreover, brought to light nothing explaining his absence, other than, the revolver case mentioned by Miss Farley.

A crayon portrait on an easel, however, showed Maybrick to be a splendidly built, striking type of man, with a strong, smoothly shaved face, a classic cast of features, and obviously a man of sterling character and extraordinary mental vigor.

Nick lingered only to direct Mrs. Soule to do nothing about the matter, but to answer inquiries by stating that Mr. Maybrick was away for a few days, and the two detectives then departed.

There was a look of increasing determination on Nick's strong, clean-cut face, however, when they walked away and rounded a corner of St. Lawrence's Church.

"I'm going to find that woman, Patsy, or lose a leg in the attempt," he said bluntly.



“I’m with you, chief,” Patsy quickly declared.

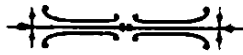
“We’ll begin with getting Kate Crandall’s measure,” Nick added. “Miss Farley told me that she has an office in the business section. I will pay her a visit and see how she lines up.”

“Am I to go with you?”

“You are to remain outside,” said Nick. “I may decide not to expose my hand, which would be to our disadvantage if she really is responsible for Maybrick’s absence.”

“That’s right, too.”

“It may be necessary to shadow her, moreover, so you had better stick round outside and await my instructions. There will be something doing, I think, after I have interviewed this woman.”



CHAPTER IV

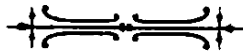
NICK CARTER'S RUSE

Two o'clock found Nick Carter at the door of an office on the second floor of the local bank building. He was reading the tenant's sign on a polished brass plate: "Kate Crandall. Public Stenographer."

Nick listened briefly, hearing nothing from within, and he then opened the door and entered.

The office was attractively furnished. A costly Persian rug covered the floor. Against one of the walls stood an expensive roll-top desk. On a stand near by were two typewriters. On a table in the middle of the office, covered with books and magazines, was a huge cut-glass jar, literally overflowing with magnificent roses.

Nick instantly noticed these costly furnishings, which were much too expensive for one who



works for a living, and he drew a correct conclusion—that Kate Crandall had wealthy admirers, and that she had no scruples over accepting valuable tokens of their affection.

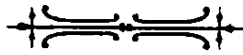
She was seated in an armchair near one of the lace-draped windows, absorbed in a magazine story when the detective entered.

She was a pronounced brunette, strikingly handsome, with regular features, a rich velvety complexion, languorous dark eyes, and full red lips, a face evincing a sensuous nature and a fiery temper. Her fine figure was a bit showily clad. Several costly diamonds adorned her shapely hands. One high-heeled French shoe and a bit of silk hosiery protruded from below her stylish blue skirt.

“Fly and fancy is right,” thought Nick, recalling Patsy’s prediction.

Looking up when he entered, Kate Crandall received him with a smile and laid aside her magazine.

“Good afternoon, sir,” she said, greeting him agreeably. “Take a seat.”



“You are Miss Crandall?” returned Nick inquiringly.

“Yes, sir,” said Kate, bowing.

“My name is Henderson,” said Nick, taking a chair. “Do I find you busy just now?”

“No, indeed, not at present. What can I do for you?”

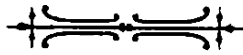
“Not very much just now, Miss Crandall, but considerable later, providing your terms are satisfactory and my work agreeable to you,” Nick said suavely.

“I work entirely on a space basis.”

“That will suit me.”

“What is the character of the work, Mr. Henderson?”

“I am a writer of photo dramas for a leading New York moving-picture concern,” Nick glibly informed her. “I have a long contract with the firm and require the help of a competent stenographer to prepare my scenarios. The work is not difficult and will pay you well.”



“I will undertake it,” said Kate, nodding her finely poised head. “I can discontinue it if found distasteful.”

“Certainly.”

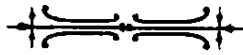
“When will you want me to begin?”

“Probably on Monday, when I will show you how I wish the work done and discuss other details with you.”

“That will be agreeable to me, Mr. Henderson,” said Kate unsuspectingly.

Nick had detected, up to that time, nothing beyond the points mentioned, but he had hit upon a ruse for evoking a self-betrayal from the woman, as may be inferred from his artful pretensions.

“I will see you here Monday morning, then,” said he, apparently about to go. But he immediately added, as if hit with an idea: “Before leaving, by the way, I will employ you to write a letter for me to my firm, whom I wish to inform of my intentions. Will you take it in shorthand, or——”



“I will typewrite it from your dictation?” Miss Crandall interposed, taking a seat at one of the typewriters and deftly adjusting a sheet of blank paper. “Shall I date it from here, Mr. Henderson?”

“If you please,” said Nick.

Click—click—click—click!

Miss Crandall’s tapering fingers moved swiftly over the keys. Nick saw at a glance that she was an expert. He moved his chair near the end of the table, to a position enabling him to watch her face.

“All ready, Mr. Henderson.”

She glanced at him and smiled a bit oddly.

Nick began to dictate:

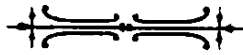
“Klein & Coster, Eccles Building, New York.”

Click—click—click—clickerty—click!

“Dear sirs.”

Click—click—clickerty—click—click!

Nick continued, amid continuing clicking:



“I have to-day made arrangements with a competent stenographer and will set to work upon the series of dramas we were discussing yesterday. You may expect a scenario of the first one early next week. I think you will prefer for a starter the sensational detective drama I mentioned to you, featuring the peerless American sleuth, Nick Carter. The story of the drama relates to the mysterious disappearance of a parish priest, who, in spite of his religious vows, falls desperately in love with a very wealthy and beautiful girl, who——”

The clicking suddenly stopped.

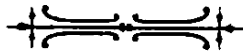
Kate Crandall’s deft hands had gone wrong. She had struck several wrong keys. She reached for an eraser, saying quickly:

“One moment, please.”

Nick saw that she was turning pale. Her arching dark brows had knit perceptibly.

“Certainty,” he said, suavely.

Kate erased the misprinted letters and readjusted the traveler. She then gazed steadily at the



detective for a moment, as if fain to read his mind, and she then said tersely:

“Continue.”

Nick went on without a change of countenance, quite as if there had been no interruption.

“The wealthy and beautiful girl, deeply in love with the parish priest, permits him to renounce his vows and pledges her hand to him in marriage.”

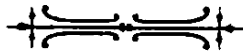
Click—click—clickerty—click!

The shapely, swiftly moving hands of the stenographer were unsteady, were trembling visibly.

“It appears, however, that another woman suspects the intentions of the parish priest, a woman involved with him in a way ultimately revealed in the drama, and she subjects him to a secret espionage, which leads to a crime——”

The clicking stopped short again.

A crimson flood imbued Kate Crandall’s cheeks for a moment, then faded quickly, leaving her ghastly pale. She steadied herself with an effort. She reached up and removed the sheet of paper



from the typewriter, tearing it quickly and tossing it into a wastebasket.

“Excuse me!” she said curtly, her dark eyes turning upon Nick with a fiery glance. “I have decided, Mr. Henderson, that I will not take your work. Do not call here again, sir. Good day.”

She arose while speaking, then turned quickly and gazed from the window.

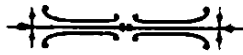
“Dear me!” Nick exclaimed, with affected astonishment. “Why so, Miss Crandall? What is the meaning of this sudden change of mind?”

“I do not care to make any explanation,” she said sharply. “Attribute it to a whim, to caprice, or anything else that suits you.”

“But you must have a reason, some cause for _____”

“The work would be distasteful,” snapped Kate, wheeling sharply around and facing him. “I shall not discuss the matter. That settles it.”

“On the contrary, Miss Crandall, it does nothing of the kind,” Nick now said, quite sternly. “This matter will be settled only when it is settled right.



I know, without your informing me, the cause of the attitude you now have taken.”

“And I know without your informing me, sir, that you are not what you pretend you are,” Kate angrily retorted. “You are here with covert designs. I have nothing more to say to you. Leave my office.”

“Not until you have told me what you know about the disappearance of the Reverend Austin Maybrick,” Nick sternly rejoined.

“Disappearance of Mr. Maybrick?”

“That’s what I said.”

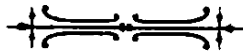
“He has disappeared, then?”

“You know that he has and that——”

The woman interrupted him with a derisive laugh.

“I know nothing of the kind,” she said curtly. “I neither know nor care anything about it. I——”

“You know, at least, what occurred in the rectory last evening,” Nick sharply interrupted. “You were spying outside of the library window at the time. You know——?”



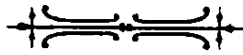
“See here, Mr. Whatever-your-name-may-be!” Kate cut in defiantly. “Anything that I know I shall keep to myself. You are a detective—that’s what you are. But I’ll put you wise to one thing right off the reel. You haven’t got anything on me, nor can you get anything. You cannot persuade, frighten, nor intimidate me. I will tell you nothing, absolutely nothing, and you may go to thunder. Get out of my office, now, or I will call a policeman and have you ejected. That’s all. I’m done with you.”

Nick came to a quick decision. He saw plainly that the woman meant what she said and could not be turned then and there. He abruptly changed his course.

“Very well,” he replied. “It will not be necessary to call a policeman.”

Nick turned with the last and departed. He had directed Patsy to wait in a doorway on the opposite side of the street, in case he might want to signal him from Kate Crandall’s window.

Nick reasoned that she might watch from the window, and see him if he rejoined his waiting assistant.

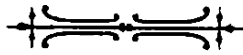


He wrote a few lines in his notebook while descending the stairs, then tore out the leaf and folded it. As he walked briskly up the street a moment later, he caught Patsy's eye and dropped the wad of paper on the sidewalk.

"Gee! there's something doing," thought Patsy. "He don't want to be seen again with me. He has dropped me written instructions."

Sauntering across the street, Patsy picked up the paper and read what Nick had written:

"Kate Crandall knows, but will not speak. Shadow her constantly until otherwise directed. Be governed by circumstances. I'm off for home. Phone me there of any discoveries."



CHAPTER V

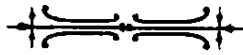
PATSY TURNS CROOK

Patsy Garvan needed no instructions beyond those contained in Nick Carter's note, nor additional information as to the position Kate Crandall had taken. It was plain enough to Patsy, and he shaped his course accordingly.

Knowing that the woman might incidentally have seen him from her window, and that she would recall him suspiciously if they met later, Patsy entered the corridor of a near building and put on a disguise with which he was provided. It by no means improved him, however, for it gave him a decidedly tough and hangdog appearance.

"It's good enough for the work to be done," he tersely soliloquized, not anticipating how effectively it was to serve him.

Returning to the street, Patsy found a concealment from which he could stealthily watch the door of the bank building, prepared to await the departure of Kate Crandall or size up any visitor she might receive. His vigil was not rewarded until five



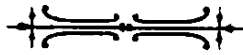
o'clock, when Kate came out and walked quickly up the street.

"Gee! she's a peach, all right," thought Patsy sententiously, who until then had had merely a glimpse at her through her office window. "She evidently has quit work for the day and is heading for home."

Patsy, was right. He also inferred from the woman's darkly handsome face that she was not in an enviable frame of mind. He stealthily followed her out of the business district and to an attractive outskirt of the town. There, just as she was turning a corner, a well-dressed man stepped from a near yard and spoke to her.

Patsy saw her draw back, as if confronted by a stranger, and then he saw the man's face, and recognized him.

"Holy smoke!" he muttered, slinking back of a tree. "This does settle it. That's Turk Magill, gangster and all-around bad egg, as sure as I'm a foot high. She just about employed him to get the gospel dispenser and—no, by Jove, she don't appear to know him. I must be wrong."



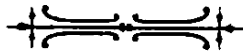
Cautiously watching them, Patsy presently decided that he was right, and that Kate Crandall was not acquainted with Turk Magill. She remained talking with him, nevertheless, frowning darkly while likening to his earnest utterances, yet occasionally glancing apprehensively toward a house around the corner.

“Gee! he’s got something on her,” thought Patsy, after a few moments. “That’s dead open and shut, or she wouldn’t listen to him. She’s doing so under protest; that’s a cinch.”

Magill was a well-built, florid man, a thousand times more prepossessing externally than within, and Patsy quickly saw that the rascal’s arguments, persuasion, or of whatever his talk consisted, would not immediately prove effective.

He saw, too, that he could not directly approach the couple without incurring suspicion, but that he might hasten around the square and approach them through the other street, possibly getting a line on their talk by passing near them.

“It’s worth trying,” he said to himself. “The woman, at least, cannot give me the slip.”



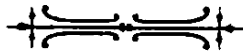
Patsy did not defer this move. Sheltered by the tree then hiding him, he retraced his steps and darted through a near street, presently rounding the square and sauntering toward the couple from the other direction. While he still was some fifty yards away, however, Kate Crandall abruptly left Magill and hastened to the dwelling at which she had repeatedly glanced.

Patsy rightly inferred that it was where she boarded. He passed her just as she was entering the gate, noting that she looked pale and disturbed, and had an ugly gleam in her black eyes.

Patsy also saw that Magill was watching her from around the corner and knowing the utterly depraved and desperate character of the crook, he instantly adopted a ruse that he thought might prove profitable and enable him to get a line on the game Magill was playing.

Though he heard Kate enter the house and close the door, Patsy repeatedly glanced back over his shoulder, as if hard hit with her flashy style and personal beauty.

Upon turning the corner and coming face to face with Magill, however, Patsy pretended to see him



for the first time, and to realize that his own covert admiration of the woman had been detected. He grinned, remarking rudely, as if by way of explanation:

“Don’t often see one like her. Lucky for me she went under cover, or I’d have got a crook in my neck looking backward.”

Magill looked at him sharply. It was then that Patsy’s hangdog disguise proved advantageous. Magill saw, that he was not going to stop, or so it appeared, and he said quickly:

“Wait a bit!”

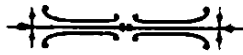
“Wait for what?” questioned Patsy, pausing.

Magill eyed him searchingly for several seconds “You’d wait for the skirt, wouldn’t you?” he asked, with unmistakable significance.

Patsy grinned again expressively.

“Rather!” said he. “I’d wait for her till I hadn’t a leg to stand on.”

“You might do worse, pal,” said Magill suggestively.



“You mean I couldn’t do better,” returned Patsy. “But I’m not in the class with swell skirts like her.”

“She’s not so swell.”

“Isn’t she?”

Patsy looked surprised and his eyes took on a light well in keeping with his disguised countenance. He now shrewdly surmised that Magill had a use for him, that he had designs that he could not carry out alone, and that he needed a confederate. This suited Patsy to the letter. He added incredulously, nevertheless, lest his inference and readiness might be suspected:

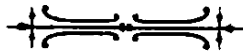
“That don’t go down. There’s nothing in it—nothing for me.”

“Think not?”

“That’s what.”

“I can put you in a way to become friendly with her,” said Magill, with squinting scrutiny.

“You can?” Patsy demanded.



“Surest thing you know. But you’d have to take chances,” Magill pointedly added.

“Chances, eh? Chances cut no ice with me. I’d take the longest ever.”

“Is that right?” asked Magill, smiling.

“Try me and see,” said Patsy; then abruptly: “Say, what’s your game? You ain’t stringing me along in this fashion for nothing.”

“I’m trying to get your measure,” Magill frankly admitted.

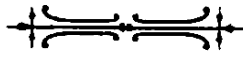
“Is that so?” Patsy spoke with affected resentment. “What do you want of it? How do you like it, as far as you’ve got?”

“You look all right,” Magill vouchsafed dryly.

“Well, I ain’t dolled up for anything,” Patsy bluntly asserted. “I’m just as you see me, all on the surface. Take it or leave it. It’s up to you.”

Magill was favorably impressed, and he waxed confidential.

“See here, pal, what’s your name?” he inquired.



“Jack Dolan,” said Patsy readily.

“Do you hang out around here?”

“Not so far away I can’t hoof it.”

“What’s your business?”

“Chauffeur—when I’m in on a job,” said Patsy, at random, but he again shot luckily. “I’m looking for one just now, but not looking too hard.”

“Would you take a mighty soft one?” Magill questioned.

“Would a duck swim?”

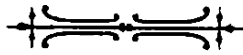
“And take chances?”

“Any you’ll take,” said Patsy. “You can gamble on that.”

“If I can gamble safely on it,” Magill replied, “I can put you on easy street, and do it without much risk.”

“You can, eh?”

“Believe me—I can!”



“Say, you cut loose, then,” said Patsy, drawing nearer. “You don’t need to beat around any more bushes. I’ll go up against anything for coin, if there’s enough of it, or for that skirt. You start right in with the bridle off and hand out your dye stuff. You’ll find me game, all right.”

Magill really thought so, now, so well had Patsy played his part. He laid his finger on Patsy’s arm, saying more impressively:

“Listen to me, Dolan. If you mean all you say, I can put you in right to share in a barrel of money. It’s not a case of crack a bank or pull off any kind of a dangerous job. The coin is where it can be easily got—barring one thing.”

“What’s that?”

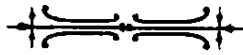
“Forcing a certain party to say where it’s hidden.”

“The coin?”

“Yes.”

“Who hid it?”

“Never mind who hid it, Dolan,” Magill objected. “Don’t you get too inquisitive. The party who hid it had no legitimate claim on it. He stole it.



Furthermore, he's dead. There will never be a kick from him. All we need do in order to get it is to force a certain party to squeal."

"How much coin is there?" asked Patsy, displaying a steadily increasing interest.

"A quarter million."

"Come again! Say that just once more."

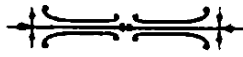
"A quarter million."

"I reckoned I must have misunderstood. Say, you ain't nutty, are you?" questioned Patsy, with a suspicious growl. "Your dome ain't cracked, is it?"

"Not a crack in it," Magill earnestly assured him. "I'm handing you straight goods. There's a quarter million that may be had for—well, Dolan, for a mere bit of chesty work. You wouldn't get in on it, mind you, only I cannot get word to pals of mine in time to use them. I want a little help."

"For what?"

"To take that skirt where she can be properly questioned," Magill said pointedly.



“Take her where?”

“To a house about three miles from here.”

“What’s the matter with a hack or a buzz wagon?”

“Either would fill the bill,” said Magill. “There is only one difficulty.”

“What’s that?”

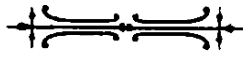
“The skirt says she won’t go,” Magill explained suggestively.

“Oh, ho; I see!” said Patsy, with eyes dilating. “You want to force her to go?”

“That calls the turn,” answered Magill. “She has agreed to meet me at the end of this street just before dark to finish the spiel I was having with her. She wouldn’t end it here for fear she’d be seen from the house where she boards.”

“I get you.”

“There are only a few scattered houses at the end of the street, and that’s the direction I, want to take her,” Magill added. “Now, if you’re not a bird head, you can see how easy it can be, done.”



“You mean to kidnap her?” said Patsy quickly.

“That’s the game.”

“And you want me to help?”

“If you’ve got the nerve.”

“I’ve got nerve enough, all right,” declared Patsy.
“But what do I get for this job?”

“Enough money to buy a corner lot on Broadway,” Magill forcibly assured him. “That’s all I want of you, too, and it’s all the risk you have to take.”

“When do I get the coin, and how much?”

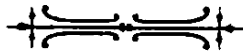
“Ten thousand bucks, possibly more, within twenty-four hours.”

“After nailing the skirt?”

“Exactly.”

“I’m hooked,” said Patsy, as if abruptly deciding to accept the offer. “Spiel off what you want done and I’ll do it.”

“Shake!” said Magill, extending his hand. “I thought I read your mug correctly. My name is



Mike Magill, sometimes called Turk Magill, and you'll find me all right and always on the level."

"If that goes, Mr. Magill, I'm your meat for any kind of a job," said Patsy. "A quarter million, eh? Say, I'm afraid I'll wake up. Hang it, I'd wade through blood for that. What am I to do?"

"We'll need a touring car," said Magill.

"I know a garage where I can swipe one."

"Swiping it might make trouble for us. Could you hire it?"

"Sure—if I had the price," said Patsy.

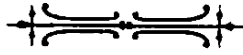
"Here's a twenty-dollar note. Will that be enough?"

"More than enough."

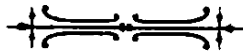
"Take it, then," said Magill. "It shows you, too, that I mean business."

"I'm wise to that, all right."

"Do your part, Dolan, and you'll get a hundred bucks for every dime in that twenty," Magill added impressively.



“You leave it to me,” Patsy rejoined. “That skirt is as good as on her way.”



CHAPTER VI

THE MAN WHO DIED

It was early evening when Nick Carter arrived home after his interview with Kate Crandall. He found Chick awaiting him. On the office table lay a small plaster cast, not there when Nick departed with Harriet Farley that morning, concerning whose mission and what since had occurred, Chick was, of course, entirely ignorant.

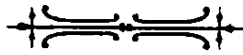
“Well, by Jove, you’ve had a long outing,” he remarked, when Nick entered and removed his coat and hat. “Have you been equally busy?”

“You know me,” replied Nick pointedly.

“None better. What’s doing?”

“A case for the young lady who prevented me from going with Mallory this morning.”

“Who is she?”



“Her name is Harriet Farley. She is the only child of the late Archibald Farley. She is worth four or five millions—and then some.”

“That ought to keep the wolf from the door, at least,” said Chick, smiling. “What’s the case?”

Nick briefly informed him, covering all of the essential points and immediately adding:

“Have you heard from Patsy?”

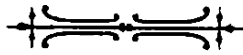
“Not a word.”

“There must be something doing, then, or he would have found time to telephone a message of some kind. How long have you been here? What’s this?”

Nick had caught sight of the plaster cast on the table. He took it up and examined it.

“One result of my trip with Mallory,” said Chick. “It’s mighty strange, Nick, how circumstances sometimes dovetail together in this big and busy world.”

“What do you mean?”



“You have not forgotten Mallory’s letter about a dead man up in Harlem?”

“Certainly not.”

“We went up there,” Chick said, more earnestly. “The address proved to be a miserable house in one of the outskirts. It appeared to be unoccupied, so we forced an entrance, though very little force was necessary, as far as that goes.”

“You found?”

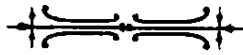
“A miserably furnished place, Nick, with indications of poverty on all sides. There was evidence that a man and woman have been living there, and so some of the neighbors informed us; but the woman has removed all of her belongings and left only the body of the man. We found the body in a dismal back room on the second floor. He has been dead about two days.”

“Murdered?”

“Not exactly.”

“What do you mean by not exactly?”

“Violence, but not murder,” said Chick. “The cause of his death was obvious. It resulted from a



bullet wound in his left shoulder. It had not been properly treated. Blood poison had ensued and sent him over the dark river.”

“H’m, that’s strange!” Nick remarked. “There must be something back of it. Could you identify him?”

“Easily.”

“Who?”

“The very man, Nick, of whom we were talking with Mallory when Vallon arrived with that letter—Jim Nordeck, the yegg cracksman, the crook suspected of having been one of the gang that robbed that Westchester savings bank.”

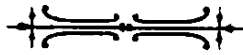
“The devil you say!”

“There was nothing to it,” Chick added. “There was no mistaking him.”

“You probably are right,” Nick replied, with a nod. “One of the gang is known to have been wounded during their hurried get-away.”

“The man was Nordeck.”

“Undoubtedly.”



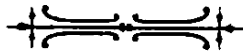
“That occurred a week ago,” Chick went on. “He evidently has been lying ill and in a bad way since then. There was convincing evidence of that. Furthermore, according to the neighbors we questioned, no physician was called and nothing definite is known about the couple. They have occupied the house nearly a month. They probably did not dare to call a physician, lest the wound might lead to an exposure of Nordeck’s identity and his part in the Westchester burglary.”

“That undoubtedly explains it,” Nick agreed. “Nordeck took a chance of recovery without the help of a surgeon. His negligence proved fatal. The writer of the letter must have been his daughter, Nancy Nordeck, whom I saw on a Harlem train a month ago.”

“That’s right, too,” Chick said. “The woman seen by the neighbors answers Nancy Nordeck’s description. She took care of her father till he died. Then she bolted, sending Chief Mallory that letter and a fifty-dollar bank note for funeral expenses.”

“It shows plainly enough that I was right.”

“In attributing the burglary to a gang including Nordeck?”



“Exactly. That bank note was part of the plunder,” said Nick. “Nordeck evidently got his share of it. He must have been dead broke before the burglary, however, or he would not have been living in such quarters as you describe. You searched the house, of course.”

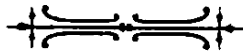
“Every nook and corner.”

“What did you find?”

“Only what I have stated. There was nothing to show where Nancy Nordeck has gone, nor any trace of the stolen money. She bolted with that, all right, or as much of it as Nordeck derived from the job. Mallory took charge of the body and will have it decently buried.”

“If we are to judge from the sentiment expressed in her letter to Mallory, the better part of the girl must have been deeply stirred by the death of her father,” Nick observed. “She wanted him to have a cloth-covered casket with silver grips, you remember, also a prayer said for him.”

“She is not entirely bad, then, after all.”



“His death may have hit her hard, Chick, and possibly will reform her. Let’s hope so for her own sake. Where did you get this cast?”

“From one of the footprints in the back yard,” said Chick. “I thought it might be needed later, perhaps, and so I sent Danny after some plaster and made a cast of the footprint. It was Nancy Nordeck’s, all right, for no other woman has recently been in the yard. She was——”

“Stop a moment,” Nick interrupted. “By Jove, Chick, you are right. Circumstances do dovetail strangely sometimes.”

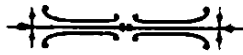
“You mean——”

“This is a facsimile of one of the imprints I found under Maybrick’s library window.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positively. Here is the run-down heel, the mark of a patch on the sole, and the size is exactly the same.”

“Great guns! that seems almost incredible,” said Chick, with a puzzled expression. “It cannot be



that Nancy Nordeck was one of the women you suspected of having been watching Maybrick.”

“On the contrary, Chick, she certainly was,” Nick insisted.

“But what motive could she have had? A clergyman is about the last man on earth in whom Nancy Nordeck would have any interest. Her whole career has been a vicious one.”

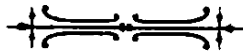
“True.”

“It must be that you are mistaken, then, and that the shoe of some other woman corresponds exactly with hers.”

“Wait a bit!” said Nick. “Let me consider all of the circumstances. I know I am not mistaken. Be quiet while I stir up my gray matter and dig out the solution of this problem.”

Nick was not long in finding it, or in framing up a theory that seemed consistent, at least, with all of the known circumstances. His thoughtful face suddenly lighted. He straightened up and exclaimed, gazing again at Chick:

“By Jove, I think I have it.”



“The answer?”

“Yes.”

“Good!”

“If I am right, however, the outlook is bad—
deucedly bad at that.”

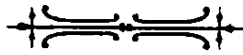
“Bad for whom?”

“For the rector, Maybrick—and for Nancy
Nordeck herself.”

“Why bad for her?” questioned Chick
perplexedly. “I don’t get you. What do you make
of it?”

“Listen.” Nick drew forward in his chair. “As sure
as you’re a foot high, the veiled woman who
visited Maybrick on Tuesday evening was Nancy
Nordeck. Her inferior attire, the likeness of this
plaster cast to the footprint under the library
window, together with all of the other
circumstances, convince me that she was the
woman.”

“But why, if she went there to visit him, did she
look through the library window?”



“To learn whether he was at home and alone. That would have been a perfectly natural step for her to have taken.”

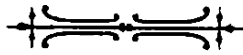
“True, Nick, as far as that goes,” Chick allowed. “But why on earth did she visit Maybrick? What business can a crook of her class have had with a clergyman?”

“That is suggested, at least, in the letter she sent to Mallory.”

“You mean?”

“The sentiment I detected between the lines,” said Nick. “That girl, Chick, for she’s little more than a girl, was so deeply affected by the death of her father that she resolved to reform. There’s nothing else to it. She went to Maybrick and told him about the burglary, and she offered to turn over the plunder to him that he might restore it to the bank officials.”

“Oh, hold on!” Chick exclaimed incredulously. “You are overlooking no end of contradictory points. How, to begin with, did Nancy Nordeck come in possession of the plunder?”



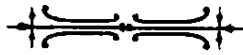
“That is easily explained,” Nick replied. “We know that Jim Nordeck has been repeatedly buncoed and cheated by his pals, and he may in this case have insisted upon taking charge of the plunder until it could have been equally divided. The gang would have consented to that, of course, for they could not have cracked the vault without his assistance. He was the big squeeze in that part of the work.”

“That’s very true,” Chick allowed.

“If I am right, then, Nordeck took it to the house in which he died, or hid it somewhere else, perhaps, expecting to recover from his wound and soon whack up with his confederates, who, evidently, were not living with him and Nancy in the Harlem house.”

“Surely not, Nick, or they would have been seen by the neighbors.”

“Instead, however, Nordeck died, and the girl experienced a change of heart. I now feel dead sure of that, Chick, and it’s not the first time that death has brought about such a reformation.”



“But why did she not, in that case, take the plunder directly to the bank officials, or turn it over to the police?”

“For two reasons, perhaps,” Nick pointed out. “She may have feared arrest, or knew that she would be watched and would be prevented by other members of the gang.”

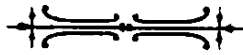
“Possibly.”

“The fact that they did not go to the Harlem house and force her to give up the plunder, moreover, convinces me that Nordeck had hidden it somewhere, and, that after his death, Nancy alone knew where it could be found.”

“I see.”

“She did not dare to go and remove it, however, lest she should be seen and waylaid by the gang. She went to Maybrick, therefore, and told him all of the circumstances. It would have been perfectly natural for her to select him, for his charitable work among the criminal classes is widely known, and she would have felt sure that she could rely upon him.”

“That goes without saying,” said Chick.



“This theory is further confirmed by the fact that Maybrick left home the following night with two empty suit cases,” Nick argued.

“In which to bring home the plunder?”

“Exactly.”

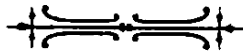
“But why did he draw five hundred dollars from the bank?”

“H’m, let’s see,” Nick said thoughtfully. “It’s obvious that Nancy Nordeck is nearly penniless, aside from the bank funds. She may have refused to take any more of the stolen money, yet may have insisted upon having funds with which to leave the country. She is wanted for several petty crimes, you know.”

“True.”

“Maybrick must have drawn his own money to give her, knowing he would afterward be reimbursed by the bank officials. There is a reward of ten thousand dollars for the recovery of the funds.”

“The girl could have got that,” said Chick.



“If she has had the turn of heart that the circumstances lead me to suspect, she would not accept the reward,” Nick replied. “That is a woman’s way of doing things.”

“I begin to think you are right Nick, after all.”

“I feel pretty sure of it.”

“But how do you account for Maybrick’s absence and his——”

“That’s the worst feature of the case,” Nick put in.

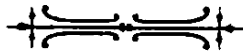
“You mean?”

“That he’s in bad, most likely, as well as Nancy Nordeck.”

“I don’t quite get you.”

“Suppose I am right,” said Nick. “Suppose this theory is correct. It’s a copper-riveted cinch, Chick, in that case, that the gang that committed the burglary has been stealthily watching Nancy Nordeck and——”

“By thunder, I see the point!” cried Chick, more gravely. “You think they have got both her and Maybrick, and also have landed the plunder.”



“It certainly looks so. Furthermore—wait! There’s my telephone bell. We may hear from Patsy.”

Nick turned quickly to his desk and took up the instrument.

“Hello!” he said quietly.

No answer.

He called again a bit louder:

“Hello! hello!”

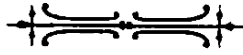
Still no answer.

Nick’s brow clouded.

Then, suddenly, there fell upon his listening ears a quick, intermittent tapping. He listened even more intently. His countenance lighted, then clouded again, darker than before. He seized a pad of paper and a pencil and began to write, listening all the while.

Three minutes passed and Nick then hung up the receiver and sprang to his feet.

“Bring Danny and the car as quickly as possible,” he cried. “We’ve got to make a record run, if ever



we made one. Guns on your hips, Chick. Patsy in the hands of the gang.”



CHAPTER VII

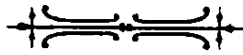
TAKING LONG CHANCES

Patsy Garvan and Turk Magill, after arriving at a very lucid understanding concerning Kate Crandall, speedily decided how their felonious design could best be executed. Patsy entered into it, moreover, with a zest that further assured Magill of his sincerity, of which he had scarce a shadow of doubt when they parted to begin operations.

Leaving Magill to keep his appointment with Kate, Patsy hastened to a public garage that he had seen while shadowing her from her office. Luckily, too, he immediately found the proprietor, to whom he quickly introduced himself and confided the situation.

Patsy found in him a willing assistant, too, who provided him with a touring car, but flatly refused to accept any payment.

“I’ll not even think of it,” he protested, when Patsy tried to force Magill’s twenty-dollar bank

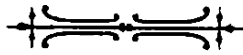


note upon him. "Pastor Maybrick is a friend of mine, and he's one man in a million. Nick Carter is one in ten millions, moreover, and it's a pleasure to serve both of them. You take the car, Mr. Garvan, and return it when convenient. It's yours for the asking. I'd like to do more, and I wish you good luck."

Patsy thanked him heartily and guided the car from the garage within twenty minutes after parting from Magill. He knew that he was playing a hazardous game and taking long chances, that he was going up against as dangerous and desperate a man as ever stood in leather, as well as crooks of like character, and that a slip of the tongue, or even the ghost of a mishap, might at any moment expose his subterfuge and put him in peril of his life.

It was not in Patsy's nature to shrink from the undertaking on that account, however, and he hardly gave it a thought. He felt that the game was worth the candle, and he was ready to burn the candle at both ends.

Daylight was turning to the dusk of early evening when he left the garage. It was just about the time when Kate Crandall had promised to meet Magill,



and Patsy at once headed for the point agreed upon. He discovered them when he entered the long street leading out of the town, moreover, and he slowed down to approach them moderately.

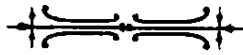
Magill saw him coming. Increasing confidence in him mingled with his feeling of grim satisfaction. He was talking earnestly with the woman, then in a locality where there were only a few scattered dwellings; but he had relieved her of any misgivings by turning back with her toward the town, though, in reality, only to see and make ready for Patsy when he approached. He reached into his pocket and grasped a large silk handkerchief with which he was provided.

Half a minute later brought Patsy within thirty yards of the couple. He then swerved toward them, bringing the car to a stop near the curbing.

“Beg pardon, sir,” said he, leaning out, and, at the same time, deftly unlocking the door of the tonneau. “Will this road take me to Bronxville?”

Kate Crandall paused.

Magill shook his head and stepped back of her as if to point the way for his questioner.



“No, not straight ahead,” he replied, with a significant wink. “You must take the first crossroad.”

“To the left, or right?”

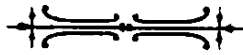
“To the left, and—now, Dolan, get her!”

Magill had clapped the silk handkerchief over Kate’s mouth, and, as quick as a flash, was tying it back of her head.

Patsy, equally quick, leaped from the car and seized her arms, forcing them behind her and crying hurriedly:

“Tie her wrists, Magill, with another handkerchief. I’ve got her. She can’t yip. Her struggles cut no ice. Into the car with her, now, and the trick is turned.”

In spite of her frantic efforts to escape, it was a comparatively easy task for two strong and determined men to quickly overcome the frightened woman, who was hurriedly forced into the tonneau even while Patsy was speaking. She then sank, half fainting, in one corner, unable to make any outcry and hardly able to move.



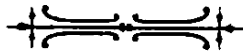
Magill banged the door and sat down beside her, crying sternly:

“You’ll not be hurt, woman, if you keep still and do what you’re told. Now, Dolan, away with you. Follow this road for half a mile, then take the left fork. I’ll direct you later. You’re all right from your toes up, pal, and you’ll get the coin I promised you. Let her go lively.”

The last was entirely unnecessary. The speedometer already was showing forty miles, and the last of the scattered dwellings were quickly left behind.

The dusty road swept like a gray ribbon under the swiftly moving car, the skillful driving of which Magill was quick to see and appreciate, while Patsy was inwardly congratulating himself upon having informed the rascal that his vocation was that of a chauffeur.

Under Magill’s repeated assurances that she was in no personal danger, Kate Crandall’s first flash of terror had subsided, and she appeared to yield more calmly to the situation, though a fiery gleam in her black eyes plainly evinced her impotent fury and resentment.



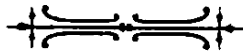
With one eye on the woman, the other on the road ahead, Magill frequently shouted additional instructions to Patsy, who quickly followed them with merely a nod in response.

Patsy had, of course, no idea as to their precise destination. He was thoroughly familiar with the country through which they were speeding, however, knowing by name nearly every important road in Westchester County, and he soon foresaw in what part of it they were likely to bring up. His anticipations soon were verified. Magill suddenly leaned forward and cried, pointing up the woodland road, then only dimly discernible in the increasing darkness:

“Slow down when rounding the bend, Dolan; then take the lane on the left. It will bring you to an old stone house in a clearing. That’s the crib. The going is bad in the lane, but you can make the side yard all right. You’ll see lights in the distance. Head for them.”

“I get you, Mike,” Patsy cried back at him; then, to himself: “I’ll get you for keeps, too, by thunder, barring a slip-up.”

The touring car swept around a long curve in the woodland road. Scattered lights in the distance



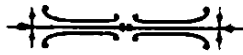
came into view. Seen through the trees and from the moving car they appeared and vanished again and again like fluttering fireflies seen in the gloom of a summer night.

Patsy knew the distant settlement. He noted the precise location of the grim old house that also came into view, looming up against a background of woods and the star-studded purple of the sky. A feeble ray of light here and there from the lower windows told that it was occupied, but that the outer blinds were closed and the curtains drawn.

“Swing round to the right, Dolan, and you’ll bring up at the side door,” Magill directed. “That’s the stuff. Leave me to do the talking. I’ll put you in right, Dolan, for what you have done.”

“I’ll do as much for you, Magill,” replied Patsy, with dry significance.

He had rounded a corner of the gloomy stone building and stopped some ten feet from a side door. A whistle from Magill was answered with a cry from within, quickly followed by the heavy tread of men on a bare floor. The door was hurriedly opened and a stream of light from the side hall fell upon the touring car and its occupants.



It also distinctly revealed the three men who had responded to Magill's signal. One was a short, swarthy fellow in the twenties, a stranger to Patsy, but whose vicious character was plainly reflected in his sinister face.

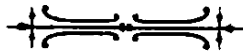
Another was tall and gaunt, with squinted eyes and cadaverous countenance; while the third was a square-shouldered, powerful man of fifty, with a smoothly shaved, hard-featured face, evincing imperious will and bulldog aggressiveness.

Patsy instantly recognized the last two men, both crooks and cracksmen of national reputation, and he also realized more keenly that he was carrying his life in his hand.

"Blink Morgan and Ginger Gridley," he said to himself. "I'm in right, by thunder, if I can only stay right and keep things coming my way. If not—gee! I can see my finish."

These thoughts flashed through Patsy's mind while Gridley, striding from the house, cried harshly:

"What's this, Turk? What's the meaning of this? Why——"



“Oh, you back up, Ginger, till I have time to explain,” Magill interrupted, springing from the car. “Lend a hand, Morgan, and take this skirt inside. She’s the cat who queered our game last night. We’ve got her where we want her, now, all right. Take her in.”

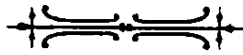
The cadaverous man with squinted eyes, from which he derived his nickname, hastened to obey, Magill having rudely forced the woman to get out of the car while he was speaking, and she then was seized by Morgan and hurried into the house.

Gridley, in the meantime, whom Patsy knew must be the leader of the gang, gazed with frowning eyes from one to the other, and then sternly repeated his question:

“What’s the meaning of this, Magill? Why have you brought her here?”

“Because she wouldn’t yield to persuasion,” Magill curtly declared. “We must force her to tell what we want to know. That could not be done without bringing her here.”

“You still think she knows?”



“She must know. She heard all that infernal squealer said.”

“But who is this fellow?”

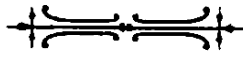
“He helped me get her. He’s all right, too,” Magill forcibly asserted. “Get out, Dolan, and shake hands with Tom Gridley, more often called Ginger Gridley. You’ll find him full of ginger, too, if you cross him badly. He’s all right, Tom, and I couldn’t have got the skirt without his help. He hired the car with some money I gave him and _____”

“Come inside,” Gridley interrupted, extending his hand to Patsy. “It’s all right, Dolan, if you’re all that Magill says you are.”

“I’m all that, and something more,” Patsy coolly assured him. “You can bank on me as long as I’m used right.”

“You’ll have no kick coming, Dolan, if you’re handing us straight goods,” replied Gridley. “If not——”

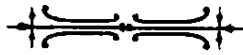
“Nothing doing in the if-not line,” put in Patsy tersely.



“This way, then. Lock the door, Phelan.”

The last was addressed to the fourth man of the gang, while Patsy followed them into the house. He heard the ominous click of the lock when Phelan turned the key. It told him there was no retreat, no backing out of the hazardous undertaking into which he had fearlessly ventured.

Patsy Garvan, however, had no such inclination even for a moment.



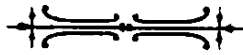
CHAPTER VIII

PATSY'S CLEVER WORK

Gridley led the way into a large, square room. Like the exterior of the grim stone house, it bore all the earmarks of antiquity. Great beams crossed the faded ceiling. The discolored walls were partly wainscoted. A smoldering log burned in a huge stone fireplace.

The furnishings in the room were old and threadbare. An oil chandelier lighted the scene. It was suspended above a table, on which were several newspapers and a few old books, also a telephone—the only modern fixture in the room.

Kate Crandall was seated on an old sofa, still bound and gagged, and in charge of Blink Morgan, but, apparently, nerved to meet whatever might follow.



“Sit down, Dolan, till I am ready to talk with you,” Gridley commanded, when all hands had entered the room. “Now, Turk, out with the whole business. Where did you pick him up and why?”

“I’ll tell you where and why he——” Patsy began.

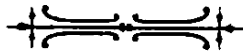
“You keep quiet,” Gridley sharply interrupted. “You’ll have your say, Dolan, when the time comes. Sit down and close your trap till you’re asked to open it.”

“Sure thing, if that’s the way you feel about it,” Patsy coolly acquiesced.

He saw plainly that Gridley not only was the leader of the gang, but, also, that he ruled with a rod of iron. He realized, too, that he might not be able to blind Gridley as successfully as he had fooled Magill, and Patsy immediately set about casting an anchor to the windward.

He had caught sight of the telephone on the table. He took a chair near it. He knew that he could not use it in any ordinary way, yet he felt that he might craftily turn it to some advantage.

He also knew, of course, nothing about the discoveries Chick had made and the theory Nick

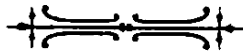


was at that moment elucidating in his business office in Madison Avenue, but he did know, at least, that any communication to their office would speedily reach one of them, if not both.

“There’s nothing for me in holding up this gang before I get wise to their game,” he reasoned, while Magill was hurriedly explaining what had occurred, which then held the entire attention of his three confederates. “I’ll wait till I get next to the whole business, and then decide what to do,” Patsy added to himself. “I can pick it up, all right, when they begin to talk with this woman. Gee whiz! but I don’t fancy that.”

Furtively watching Gridley, while Magill was stating how they had met and what had followed, Patsy detected a steadily deepening frown on Gridley’s hard-set face. It smacked of incredulity, of increasing misgivings, and Patsy scented trouble.

“That infernal rascal is not going to swallow my story without something to wash it down,” he thought, a bit grimly. “I must sharpen up my wits and be ready for him, if he starts in to put me through the wringer. By Jove, I’ll have something else ready, too. I reckon I can work it undetected.”



Magill still was talking earnestly to his three confederates.

Patsy leaned nearer the table, resting one arm on it, and stealthily placed three of the books in a pile and gradually drew them close to his elbow. He accomplished this just as Magill ended his story, when Gridley replied with a doubtful growl and a side glance at Patsy:

“It strikes me, Turk, that you have taken long chances.”

“Chances?” said Magill, frowning.

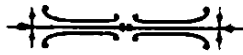
“Yes. You really know nothing about him.”

“Only what he told me.”

“That may not be true.”

“But the circumstances and what he has done _____”

“All are right as far as they go,” Gridley curtly interrupted. “But they are not enough. We must be dead sure of him. We must find out just who he is and where——”



“Say, are you ginks talking about me?” Patsy cut in, with affected resentment.

“Yes, we’re talking about you,” snapped Gridley. “You’re a stranger to us. We might get in wrong, you know, in blindly relying upon a stranger.”

“Oh, is that so?” Patsy retorted. “And I might throw a shoe, too, by helping a strange gang in such a game as you guys are playing. What do you want—my pedigree?”

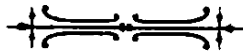
“See here, Dolan——”

“Oh, I’m seeing all there is to see,” cried Patsy, frowning. “You’ll find out, mebbe, that I’m a law-and-order spotter, or a central-office sleuth.”

“It would cost you something, all right, if we did.”

“You guys give me a pain. I’ll tell you now. I’ll show you the way,” Patsy forcibly added, seizing the telephone for a moment, but quickly replacing it on the table.

“There is one man who can tell you all about me. He will give it to you straight,” he quickly went on, now shouting with pretended resentment. “Call up 47 Madison! 47 Madison! Here, I’ll write



it for you on the edge of this newspaper, so you'll make no mistake. 47 Madison! Ask who Jack Dolan is, and——"

"Dry up!" snapped Gridley, interrupting, while Magill, Morgan, and Phelan stared from one to the other. "I'll not telephone to anybody. You keep cool, Dolan, and answer my questions. This is nothing for you to get hot about. Who is the party, anyway?"

"He runs a barroom near Madison Avenue," said Patsy curtly.

"What's his name?"

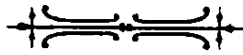
"Jim Donovan. He knows all about me. He'll tell you who I am and whether you can bank on me."

"Sure, Ginger, we can bank on him," Magill now cried impatiently. "He's all right, or he wouldn't have lent me a hand to get the skirt."

"That's right, too," Morgan chimed in confidently.

"He'll go the limit, Ginger, you can bet on that."

"So he will, perhaps, but there was no harm in making sure of it," Gridley now said, less harshly, evidently impressed with these arguments and the



attitude Patsy had taken. "He ought not to kick at that."

"Oh, he's not kicking. He's all right, Gridley, from his toes up," Magill insisted. "He knows what he's doing."

The blinded rascal never spoke more truthfully.

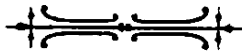
Patsy already had turned one of the cleverest tricks of his exceedingly clever career.

All the while during the heated discussion, which had absorbed the entire attention of the four crooks, Patsy had been tapping with his lead pencil on the metal mouthpiece of the telephone.

He had so placed the instrument near the pile of books that they lifted the receiver sufficiently to let its hook rise and make a connection with the number he thrice had shouted—chiefly, of course, for the ears of the exchange operator.

The position of the telephone was not suggestive of the ruse. One would have observed only by chance that the books raised the receiver.

The tapping with a pencil was not noticed by either of the four crooks.



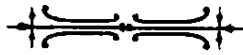
The quick, intermittent taps sped instantly over the wire. They were the taps distinctly heard by Nick Carter in his business office. They conveyed to him what Patsy could not vocally impart—this tapped communication by the ordinary telegraphic code, with which Nick and all his assistants were perfectly familiar:

“Cornered. Stone house. Baldwin Road, Westchester. Half mile east of Granger settlement. Rush. Will hold up gang if——”

Patsy had ended it abruptly.

He saw Gridley’s evil eyes cast toward him. He dropped his pencil and with his elbow, as if by accident, he quickly upset the telephone and prevented the detection of his exceedingly artful ruse.

Turning quickly to catch the falling instrument, however, Patsy met with a mishap that threatened to pervert all of the good work he had done. His hasty movements caused something to drop from his vest pocket. It fell to the floor near his chair. He did not see it, but it instantly caught the eye of Turk Magill—the twenty-dollar bank note said to have been used for automobile hire.



It gave Magill's confidence a sudden, terrible jolt. His faith in Dolan oozed out of his every pore. He flashed a swift, significant glance at Gridley, then walked carelessly back of Patsy's chair—only to turn quickly and seize him from behind, confining his arms and crying sharply:

“Sit quiet! If you are all right, Dolan, you have nothing to fear. But——”

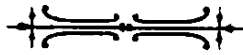
“Here's the but!”

It was a big revolver in the hand of Ginger Gridley. He sprang up when Patsy began to struggle, thrusting the weapon directly under his nose and adding fiercely:

“Sit quiet, as you're told, or I'll put you in shape for an undertaker. We'll soon find out who you are and whether you're on the level. Bring a piece of rope, Phelan, and tie him to the chair. Be quick about it.”

“Oh, very well,” said Patsy coolly. “But what's it all about? Have your noodle boxes gone wrong? Why this sudden change of mind, Magill?”

Magill did not reply immediately. He waited until Phelan came with a piece of rope, with which



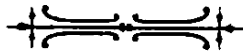
Patsy's arms were quickly bound to the back of the chair. He then picked up the bank note, quickly displaying it and crying:

"You have lied to me once, Dolan, and your whole story may be a string of lies, as Gridley suspects. You said you paid for the car with this money. You lied! This is the same bank note I gave you."

"So 'tis," said Patsy, with dry terseness. "But don't let that worry you, Magill. Never worry over picking up a twenty case. You're dead lucky to get it back."

Patsy now saw plainly enough what had occasioned this sudden aggressiveness. He saw, too, that the moment was fast approaching when subterfuge would be utterly futile, when even his identity might be discovered, and he at once took the only course left open for him—that of prolonging the conversation and staving off any desperate move of these rascals, until his combination telephone-and-telegraph appeal could be answered.

For though the telephone receiver was muffled by its position on the books, Patsy had faintly heard Nick's repeated hello and recognized his voice,



and he felt reasonably sure, from his succeeding silence, that the tapped message had been received and rightly interpreted.

Magill's face, like that of every man of the gang, had taken on a frown as black as midnight. He shook the bank note in Patsy's face, retorting fiercely:

"Lucky to get it back, am I? Well, you'll be mighty lucky to get out of here with your life, if we find that you have tricked us."

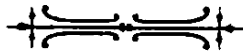
"Oh, I have not tricked you," Patsy calmly asserted. "You're getting all haired up over nothing. I'll explain to your entire satisfaction, Magill, if you give me time."

It was for time, indeed, that Patsy then was playing.

"Out with it, then," snarled Gridley, again taking the ribbons. "What do you mean? How came you with this money?"

"Magill gave it to me."

"But you said you hired the touring car with it."



“No, I didn’t,” said Patsy. “He only thought I did. The truth is, Mr. Gridley, I hated to let go of twenty bucks that had come so easy. So I hung on to the long green, instead, and stole the touring car from in front of a house.”

“I ordered you not to steal one,” cried Magill.

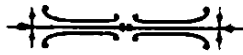
“I know it,” said Patsy, with a grin. “But I ain’t much on obeying orders. I reckoned a stolen car would serve as well for the job we had framed up, and since I was going into a thieving game, I thought I might as well swipe a car and be hung for a sheep as a lamb.”

“He’s lying!” Gridley said sternly. “See what else he has in his pockets. Search him from head to foot and—what’s that?”

Magill had quickly obeyed, thrusting his fingers into Patsy’s vest pockets. From one of them he drew out a crumpled scrap of paper, thoughtlessly put there by Patsy after having read it.

“It’s a leaf from a notebook,” he cried. “Here’s writing on it.”

“Writing on it?”



“Thundering guns! Whom are we up against?” Magill added, with a growl. “Listen, Gridley, listen!”

Magill straightened up with lips viciously twitching and read it aloud—the communication from Nick Carter to Patsy:

““Kate Crandall knows, but will not speak. Shadow her constantly until otherwise directed. Be governed by circumstances. I’m off for home. Phone me there of any discoveries.””

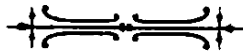
“Gee whiz, it’s all off now, for fair,” thought Patsy. “I’m booked for all I’ve invited, unless the chief shows up.”

There certainly were indications of it. Gridley snatched the paper from Magill and read it himself, then uttered a terrible oath.

“This does settle it,” he fiercely muttered. “A detective—that’s what he is!”

“Sure thing,” snarled Magill.

“Search him from head to foot, Phelan. We must find out who he is and where we stand. See if that



hair is his own and—ah, it's not his own, eh? Off with it, Phelan, the whole business."

Phelan set to work with vicious zest, and in a very few moments he not only had Patsy stripped of his disguise, but also the contents of his pockets spread upon the table—handcuffs, searchlight, two revolvers, a well-filled pocketbook, a handkerchief, keys, and other minor articles.

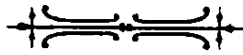
None of them bore his name and address, however, nor did Nick's brief, though very significant note, bear his signature.

A cry of increasing rage broke from Magill when the truth thus was forced upon him, but Gridley checked him with a gesture, saying sternly:

"You keep quiet, Turk, and let me handle this fellow."

"But, blast him——"

"There aren't any buts," snapped Gridley. "I'm chief of this gang, and what I say goes. I'll wring the truth out of him, you can bet on that, and we then shall know where we stand. Tell me at once—who are you?"



The last was fiercely addressed to Patsy, but Patsy was undisturbed by his ferocity. He met his fiery gaze with a frigid stare, replying indifferently:

“Jack Dolan, just as I’ve told you.”

“That’s a lie,” snapped Gridley.

“You’d say that if I told you the truth. So I might as well hand you one name as another.”

“Oh, is that so? You mean, then, that you won’t tell me?”

“I already have told you.”

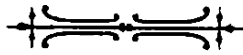
“Let it go at that, then, for the present,” said Gridley, with ominous severity. “Who gave you this note?”

“The party who wrote it,” said Patsy dryly.

“What’s his name?”

“I dunno, Mr. Gridley, on the dead. It has slipped my mind.”

“Hang him!” cried Magill impatiently. “He’s giving us the laugh. String him up and force him to answer.”



“You keep quiet,” Gridley again commanded; then to Patsy: “Why were you told to shadow this woman? That hasn’t slipped your mind?”

“No; sure thing,” said Patsy, with a glance at Kate Crandall. “I can remember that, all right.”

“Out with it, then. Why were you told to shadow her?”

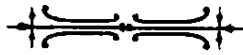
“To find out where she went,” Patsy dryly admitted.

“By Heaven, if you don’t loosen up and tell me, I’ll find a way to make you!” Gridley thundered. “Who gave you this note? To whom are you to telephone any discoveries you may——”

He broke off abruptly, hit with a sudden idea, and turned sharply around to his listening confederates.

“What was the number he mentioned?” he cried. “Can you remember it?”

“Sure!” cried Blink Morgan. “Four, seven Madison!”



“Get that telephone book.” Gridley pointed to the table. “Look for the police headquarters. See if that’s their number.”

“Rats!” growled Phelan. “He ain’t a police sleuth. He’s no plain clothsie. I know that push.”

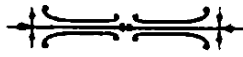
“Try the private agencies, then,” snapped Gridley. “Look up—stop a bit! Begin with Nick Carter. Try him. Look up his number.”

“Holy smoke!” thought Patsy. “Here’s where the cat makes her final jump. She’ll come clean out of the bag this time. But the rascals do not suspect the trick I’ve put over on them. That sure is my only anchor to the windward.”

Morgan and Turk Magill had turned pale when Nick Carter’s name was mentioned, and their fears were completely verified.

For Phelan, suddenly starting up from the telephone book he was hurriedly inspecting, cried excitedly:

“I’ve got it! Here’s the name and number. Four, seven Madison! It’s a telephone in Nick Carter’s business office.”



“Last jump is right,” thought Patsy.

Gridley swung round and gazed at him with murder in his eye.

“So Nick Carter wrote this note, did he?” said he, through his teeth. “You’re to telephone your discoveries to him, eh? What have you discovered? What has he got on us?”

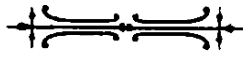
“Nothing on you that I know of,” said Patsy, unruffled. “I was not directed to shadow you fellows.”

“What on this woman, then?”

“I don’t know for sure, and I don’t think he does,” Patsy truthfully answered, not yet informed of Nick’s deductions and suspicions. “That’s dead-straight goods, Gridley, on my word.”

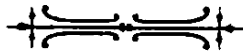
Gridley vented an oath and shaped another course.

“Make sure that he is securely tied, Phelan,” he cried sternly. “We’ll settle his hash a little later. Our first move must be to get the coin—and get it mighty quick, if Carter is dipping into this business.”



“That’s right, too,” Magill declared, glaring at Patsy. “Get the coin and bolt—that’s our only safe course.”

“We’ll take it, too, and take it on the jump,” Gridley forcibly added. “Free that woman, Morgan, and be quick about it. She shall tell us what she knows, or—God help her!”



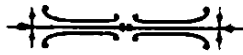
CHAPTER IX

THE LAST CALL

Kate Crandall had not stirred from the sofa during the sensational scenes just enacted. They told her only too plainly that she was in the hands of knaves who would shrink from no desperate deed that would serve their ends, and she had no thought but to escape from them by any means she could command.

Blink Morgan hastened to liberate her, while Gridley seated himself directly in front of her and sternly said:

“You’ve got mighty few minutes, woman, to tell us what we want to know. We have others here who could tell us, but whose traps are tightly closed. We have not killed them, lest we might kill our golden goose; but understand this: We’ll end them and you, too, unless you give us the information which——”



Kate Crandall checked him with a haughty gesture.

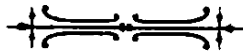
“One moment, Mr. Gridley, if that’s your name,” she said coldly. “I can tell you with very few words all that I know. You will believe me, I think, though this man refused to do so.”

She glanced at Magill, but he made no comments.

“You were seen two nights ago by him and Morgan,” said Gridley, sternly eying her. “They had followed a girl to the home of a clergyman named Maybrick. They saw her look through his library window and then enter his house. They would have listened at his window to her interview with him—but you got there first, and they could not do so without taking risks then thought to be needless. We must know what the girl told him. It’s up to you to tell us. You heard what she said, or you would not have remained to listen.”

“That is true,” Kate coldly admitted. “I heard all that she said to Mr. Maybrick.”

“Tell me,” said Gridley sternly.



“She told him that her father had recently died; that he was a criminal and had forced her to be one, but that she now was determined to reform. She told him that her father was one of a gang that had recently robbed a bank, and that he had had charge of the stolen funds and had buried them, confiding to her their hiding place while on his deathbed.”

“That’s the point,” said Gridley. “That’s the very thing we want to know—where the plunder is hidden.”

“I cannot tell you,” said Kate.

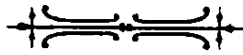
“Not tell me! Why not?”

“Because I do not know. The girl did not inform Mr. Maybrick.”

“What did she say about it?”

“She said she would take him to the spot, and that he could then remove the funds and restore them to the bank. She would not then reveal the hiding place.”

“Did she give him no hint?”



“No, none,” said Kate. “She appointed a place for him to meet her last evening, which he promised to do. That is all I can tell you.”

“Is that true?”

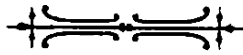
“God hearing me, it is true!” Kate solemnly declared. “I cannot possibly give you the information you expected from me. I do not know _____”

“Stop! I believe you,” Gridley cried curtly; then, turning to Blink Morgan, he harshly commanded: “Bring the jade up here, Blink, and the gospel sharp with her. I’ll find a way to force her to speak.”

Morgan seized a lamp and hastened from the room.

Patsy heard him descending the cellar stairs a moment later.

“By thunder, this is the gang that cracked that Westchester savings bank,” he said to himself. “Gee whiz! there’s half a million at stake. If the chief was right, Jim Nordeck must be the man who buried the plunder, and the girl in question must be Nancy Nordeck.”



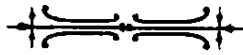
Patsy did not realize just then, however, how perfectly right Nick Carter had sized up the entire case. This appeared a moment later, when Nancy Nordeck and the missing rector were led into the room, both with their arms securely bound behind them.

The Reverend Austin Maybrick was quite pale, but he carried himself with dignity, and his fine face wore a look of scorn that told how little he feared the threatening situation. He appeared surprised when he saw Kate Crandall and Patsy, but he did not speak.

Gridley hardly noticed him. He turned at once to the girl who had entered, and then leaned wearily against the nearest wall.

She was a slender, poorly clad girl, who looked ten years older than she really was. Her dark-brown hair was in disorder, her eyes deeply ringed, but her features were regular and she would have been quite attractive, but for a wan and pinched look that told of dejection, suffering, and more of care and misery than often falls upon one of her years.

She also was surprised at seeing Patsy and Kate Crandall, but it appeared only in the sharper glint



of her large, expressive eyes, which flashed from one to another, though chiefly at Gridley, with a look of mingled determination and defiance that evinced a fearless spirit in her frail form.

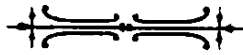
Gridley turned to her with lowering gaze, saying harshly:

“You’re surprised at seeing others here, ain’t you?”

Nancy Nordeck gave him look for look, with her thin gray lips curling contemptuously. She drew herself up a little, replying with a sinister slang that evinced her lack of refinement.

“Not on your life, Gridley. I wouldn’t be surprised at any scurvy trick that you pulled off. What d’ye want, now that you’ve brought him and me from the cellar? I’d sooner stay there than be in the same room with you.”

“Cut out that lobsouse!” commanded Gridley sternly. “I’m going to show you where you stand, and where these persons stand whom you’ve drawn into this mess. I’m going to force you, or them, to tell me where your double-dealing dad hid that plunder.”



“Oh, you are!” Nancy exclaimed derisively. “You’ll get fat trying to force that out of me. You can’t get it out of them, or any one else, for I’ve told no one. I handed you that at first, but it seems you can’t swallow it. I’m the only one who knows where the stuff is planted.”

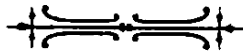
“That is true, absolutely true,” said Maybrick, with habitual dignity. “I don’t know why you have brought this other woman here, but you——”

“What you don’t know cuts no ice with us,” Gridley sharply interrupted. “You keep quiet, or I’ll find a way to make you. There’s a bunch of sleuths on this case who may make trouble for us at any moment, and I’m in no mood to mince matters. This infernal jade, if she’s the only one who knows, is going to tell me where to find that plunder.”

“Oh, is that so, Gridley?” questioned Nancy, with eyes flashing.

“You’ll find it’s so.”

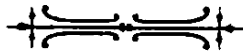
“And you’ll find it isn’t,” snapped the girl defiantly. “You put that idea out of your block. It might turn you batty.”



“See here, Gridley,” she added, with a sudden display of deeper feeling. “I’ve been a bad egg most of my life. It come to me natural, and my old man forced me into it. He’s dead now, and I stood by alone and saw the last breath go out of him. I’d never seen the like before. I’d never been where one sees the call of death—the call of death! It told me something I never knew before—but no matter what! You wouldn’t know, if I told you—and I couldn’t tell you if I tried.”

“See here——”

“You see here!” Nancy forcibly interrupted. “I’m going to have my say, and it won’t take me long. I’m done with the life I’ve led, and done with you fellows. That plunder is going back to the bank. That’s what I’m going to do for a starter on the new road. I knew you guys would watch me. I reckoned I’d better not take this gent to the place where the stuff is hid, not till I was dead sure you weren’t trailing me. So I took him to a fake place first, just to find out, and you and your push were on hand to nail us. You’ve got us, all right; but you’ll not get the coin. I fooled you—and I’ll keep you fooled. You’ll get nothing from me.”



She had told the whole story in those few passionate words, a story that might have filled a volume, and the look on Gridley's face was one to have appalled a less fearless speaker. He turned quickly to his confederates and fiercely cried:

"We'll see about that, pals! We'll find out whether she'll speak. Pull the boots off of this gospel sharp and shove his feet into the fire. She brought him into this mess. Let's see whether she'll pull him out of it. She can do it only by squealing. If not, we'll burn his feet off, and——"

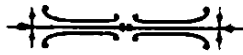
"Say!" cried Patsy. "Cut that, you fellows."

"Cut nothing! You dry up, or we'll cut out the tongue you talk with."

Nancy Nordeck had turned as white as a sheet.

"Keep quiet, my girl, and be brave," said Maybrick, observing her. "Reveal nothing—no matter what these scoundrels do. That is your new duty."

"I'll stick, sir, if you say it," said Nancy, but she was trembling from head to foot.



“Oh, you will, eh?” thundered Gridley. “We’ll see whether you will. Grab the gospel sharp, two of you, and——”

But there was no grabbing done of that nature.

Gridley’s furious commands were drowned by the crash of a falling door, the rending of blinds and the breaking of shuttered windows, at which the heads of policemen and leveled revolvers instantly appeared.

Patsy Garvan guessed the truth, and a yell broke from him.

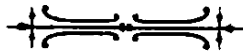
“Hurrah! Zambo! It’s all off! The chief is here!”

Patsy was right. While the words were still on his lips, Nick, Chick, and Danny tore through the hall and rushed into the room, with weapons drawn and blood in their eyes.

Gridley vented an oath and snatched up one of Patsy’s revolvers, still lying on the table.

A bullet from Nick’s weapon broke the rascal’s wrist. He fell to the floor, howling with pain.

Chick had a gun under Magill’s nose, and Morgan and Phelan had thrown up their hands.



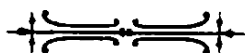
There was very little to it after that, in so far as opposition was concerned. Within five minutes the crooks were in irons, their captives liberated, and Nancy Nordeck relieved of her fears and started, indeed, on the better road.

Through her the entire amount of stolen funds were restored to the bank, or, more properly, through her and the Carters. She never was prosecuted for any of her past misdemeanors. Nick Carter made sure of that—and equally sure that Gridley and his confederates received the most severe penalty of the law.

Nick's deductions had been entirely correct, after the disclosures Chick had made, and the remarkable message from Patsy had showed them the way. Nick was right, too, in thinking that Kate Crandall, though informed of the facts, had suppressed them only with a feeling of jealous hatred and revenge for Maybrick and Harriet Farley, whose relief and gratitude over the happy turn of affairs scarce need be mentioned.



THE END

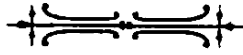


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